

UNCOLLECTED PROSE OF JAMES STEPHENS

Volume 1, 1907-15

James Stephens was an adventurous writer, exploring all the territories of prose. He wrote fiction, essays, radio scripts, literary reviews, drama, journalistic reports as well as other forms of literature.

His career began in 1907 with a modest essay in an Irish nationalist journal, and proceeded for forty-three years until the last of his broadcasts on the BBC shortly before his death at his home in London in 1950. During this period, Stephens progressed from talented amateur to highly-regarded professional, from an unknown essayist to a prominent writer, and from an author of printed works to a popular radio commentator. While his career progressed, his reputation as an artist increased to the point where he enjoyed the admiration of W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Moore and George Russell and where his abilities persuaded James Joyce to ask him to complete *Finnegans Wake* if Joyce could not do so.

While these two volumes are by no means a complete collection of Stephens' prose, this is the first time his work has been collected in this way and the pieces are carefully chosen to demonstrate the development of his artistic craftsmanship. Readers of this edition who may know Stephens as the beloved author of *The Crock of Gold*, *The Charwoman's Daughter* and other novels, can observe him in a variety of other roles: as political journalist, dramatist, speaker, critic, and storyteller.

The editor

Patricia A. McFate is President of the American-Scandinavian Foundation in New York. Her previous appointments have included Deputy Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Vice Provost of the University of Pennsylvania and she has taught at City College of New York, Northwestern University, and the Universities of Illinois and Pennsylvania. She has held scientific appointments in the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences of Columbia University and Rush Medical College and is a Fellow of the New York Academy of Sciences.

Dr McFate is the author of *The Writings of James Stephens: Variations on a Theme of Love*.

Also by Patricia A. McFate

THE DREAM PHYSICIAN by Edward Martyn (*editor*)
EDUCATION FOR THE ITINERANT STUDENT
THE WRITINGS OF JAMES STEPHENS: Variations on a
Theme of Love



Portrait of the Author as a Young Man: James Stephens writing his manuscripts in the National Library in Dublin.

Uncollected Prose of James Stephens

Volume 1, 1907-15

Edited by

Patricia A. McFate



Macmillan

Gill and Macmillan

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For UWL

Verse is a manifesting of the angel in man,
but prose is an unburying of the god.
On Prose and Verse (1928)

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Preface

James Stephens was a witty conversationalist and a versatile writer. One of the 'Great Talkers of Dublin', he wrote novels, poems, essays, literary criticism, drama, short fiction, journalistic reports, speeches and radio scripts. His quickness of thought, lack of affectation, and warmth endeared him to generations of readers and listeners. This edition of his prose celebrates his love of words and gives evidence of his literary dexterity.

While these volumes are by no means a complete collection, the fifty-nine items which have been selected place Stephens in a variety of settings and time periods, offer ideas—serious or comical—of interest to contemporary readers, and give an opportunity to observe Stephens' development as a literary craftsman.

Prefaces and other contributions to books could not be included in the space allowed for the two volumes. Book reviews and several magazine articles in which Stephens was a member of a panel of literary experts could not be accommodated. The radio scripts published in *The Listener* and subsequently printed in *James, Seumas & Jacques* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1964) have not been reprinted in this edition. With two exceptions, the items included in these volumes have not appeared in book form. The exceptions, 'Julia Elizabeth' and 'How St Patrick Saves the Irish', were privately printed and had a limited readership.

The prose pieces included in this edition have been edited to remove typographical errors and obvious mistakes in spelling and grammar; but the diction and syntax have been left unchanged in order to reflect Stephens' prose at the time of its creation. Quotations from the *Letters of James Stephens* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1974) which have been used in the Introductions to sections of this edition are cited as *Letters*.

Inevitably, there will be readers who will regret the omission of a familiar item. The editor joins them in their regret, but hopes that they will find a new favourite among those pieces printed here.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge my profound gratitude to Iris Wise, James Stephens' stepdaughter, and her husband, Norman, who, over many years, have encouraged my research on the subject of James Stephens' writing. Their generosity and patience, and the many kindnesses of Sarkes Tarzian, have made this edition possible. There are no words which sufficiently express my appreciation of my three friends.

Others who have contributed their knowledge of Ireland and Irish literature to my efforts include: Professor Richard Finneran, Dr Lola Szladits, Professor Maurice Harmon, Mrs Mona Moore, Professor Richard Ellmann, Dr Eoin McKiernan. The staff of the National Endowment for the Humanities, although not direct participants in the project, provided the collegial atmosphere necessary to undertake research. The work of Professor Jacob Neusner has always been a model of scholarly excellence for me. My recent association with Mr Leiv Arntzen, the Trustees, and the staff of the American–Scandinavian Foundation has allowed me to finish my work in an environment encouraging of scholarship. The staff of the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library has been very helpful.

In addition, I would like to thank: Mary Bain, Joseph Bordogna, Giorgio Bugliarello, Alexander Crary, Michael Dorf, Lewis Freedman, Iola Gardner, Stephen Garrett and his family, Larry Gross, Sanford Harris, Robert Hollander, Phyllis Hubbell, Demetrius Karayn, Everett Keech, Richard Lyman, Frank Mankiewicz, Philip Marcus, Michael Millman, Peggy Monaghan, David Parson, Norma and Eugene Snyder, Mary, Bruce and Sean Spivey, Judith Walker, Harry Wellington, and the Honourable Sidney R. Yates. Ric Kallaher has been a very understanding assistant. Brooke Lappin, Bruce Kellerhouse, and my friends from the Nordic countries have been patient colleagues.

I will always be indebted to my father and mother and their families for their initial encouragement of my career. This project

would not have begun nor would it have been completed without Rodney Wayson Nichols.

For permission to quote from the printed works and manuscripts of James Stephens, and to reproduce the two photographs for the frontispieces, I am indebted to Iris Wise and the Society of Authors, London (James Stephens Texts, © 1983, Mrs Iris Wise). Quotations from the *Letters of James Stephens* are reprinted by permission of Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, and Macmillan, New York. The Chronology first appeared in *The Writings of James Stephens* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979). The typescript of *The Demi-Gods* is reprinted by permission of Robert Hogan, Editor, *Journal of Irish Literature*.

Chronology

- 1882 (2 February). Date of birth used by Stephens.
- 1886–96 Attended Meath Protestant Industrial School for Boys.
(Conjecture)
- 1896 Employed as a clerk by a Dublin solicitor, Mr Wallace.
- 1901 On a gymnastic team which won the Irish Shield.
Employed by Reddington & Sainsbury, solicitors.
- 1906 Employed as a clerk-typist in the office of T. T. Mecredy & Son, solicitors.
- 1907 Began regular contributions to *Sinn Féin*. Birth of step-daughter, Iris, on 14 June; shortly thereafter announced that he had a wife, 'Cynthia' (Millicent Josephine Gardiner Kavanagh, 22 May 1882 to 18 December 1960). Discovered by George W. Russell (A.E.)
- 1909 Acted in the Theatre of Ireland's two productions of Seumas O'Kelly's *The Shuiler's Child*. Birth of son, James Naoise, on 26 October. *Insurrections*.
- 1910 Acted in the Theatre of Ireland production of Gerald Macnamara's *The Spurious Sovereign*. Associated with David Houston, Thomas MacDonagh, and Padraic Colum in founding and editing the *Irish Review* (published March 1911 to November 1914).
- 1911 Acted in Padraic O Conaire's *Bairbre Ruadh*. *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth* produced by the Theatre of Ireland.
- 1912 *The Charwoman's Daughter*; *The Hill of Vision*; *The Crock of Gold*.
- 1913 Received a commission from the *Nation* (London) to write a series of short stories. Moved to Paris. Another production of *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth* at the Hardwicke Street Theatre. *The Crock of Gold* awarded the Polignac Prize. *Here Are Ladies*; *Five New Poems*.
- 1914 *The Demi-Gods*.
- 1915 Elected Unestablished Registrar of the National Gallery of Ireland. *Songs from the Clay*; *The Adventures of Seumas Beg/The Rocky Road to Dublin*.

- 1916 *Green Branches; The Insurrection in Dublin.*
- 1918–24 Appointed Registrar of the National Gallery of Ireland.
- 1918 *Reincarnations.*
- 1919 Married 'Cynthia' (then a widow) in London on 14 May.
- 1920 *The Wooing of Julia Elizabeth* (another version of *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth*) produced at the Abbey Theatre by the Dublin Drama League. One of a series of operations for gastric ulcers. *Irish Fairy Tales.*
- 1922 *Arthur Griffith: Journalist and Statesman.*
- 1923 *Deirdre.*
- 1924 *Deirdre* presented the medal for fiction at the *Aonach Tailteann* festival. Resigned from the National Gallery (effective 1925). *Little Things; In the Land of Youth.*
- 1925 On lecture tour in America. Returned to London; shortly thereafter settled in the Kingsbury suburb of London. To America for another lecture tour. *A Poetry Recital; Christmas in Freelands.*
- 1926 *Collected Poems.*
- 1927 Friendship with James Joyce commenced. Joyce suggested that Stephens complete *Finnegans Wake* if he was unable to do so; this proposal made more formally in 1929.
- 1928 First BBC broadcast. Lecturer at the Third International Book Fair in Florence. *Etched in Moonlight; On Prose and Verse.*
- 1929 In Rumania; met Queen Marie. Trip to America; stay with W. T. H. Howe. *Julia Elizabeth: A Comedy in One Act; The Optimist; The Outcast.*
- 1930 Trip to America; stay with Howe. *Theme and Variations.*
- 1931 Trip to America; stay with Howe. *How St Patrick Saves the Irish; Strict Joy.*
- 1932 Trip to America; stay with Howe. A founder member of the Irish Academy of Letters.
- 1933–5 Yearly lecture tours to America; visits with Howe.
- 1937 Began regular series of BBC broadcasts. Accidental death of son, James Naoise, on 24 December.
- 1938 *Kings and the Moon.*
- 1940 Moved to Woodside Chapel in Gloucestershire.
- 1942 Awarded British Civil List Pension.
- 1945 Returned to London.
- 1947 Awarded honorary D. Litt. degree from Dublin University (Trinity College).
- 1950 Final BBC broadcast. Died at his home, Eversleigh, on 26 December.

Prose Writings: Undated

My life began when I started writing.

James Stephens to his stepdaughter Iris.

Those who know James Stephens' enchanting fairy tales may not be surprised to learn that he gave charming, contradictory accounts of his life. He claimed to be raised in the city slums, then wrote about his childhood in the country; on official documents he used 'County Dublin' as the location of his birth. He wrote Lewis Chase that his parents died when he was six years old; in an unpublished memoir he speaks of his parents being alive when he was ten. He told Austin Clarke that as a starving young man he fought the ducks in St Stephen's Green for bits of bread; the ducks became a swan when he mentioned the incident to Lord Grey, and a terrier when he recalled it in a BBC broadcast. He regaled Lady Gregory with hilarious stories of pinching tomatoes from street vendors for the sheer adventure of stealing. He let A.E. believe that he was hungry and homeless for over a year and that he was saved from starvation by a woman street vendor; when talking to George Moore, the woman was an 'applewoman'; she was a 'prostitute' when he told the tale to Lennox Robinson. He said his first literary model was William Blake; on other occasions he said it was Robert Browning.

Could he have written twenty-five poems the first time he attempted the genre? Would a rhinoceros have fallen in love with his shoes? His 'reminiscences' are whimsical stories filled with the mists of Ireland. Behind the humorous recollections, however, is a painful reality: no one (perhaps not even Stephens) knew the date of his birth. He used a birthdate of 2 February 1882, also the birthdate of James Joyce, who made much of this symbolic connection when he discovered it. Oliver St John Gogarty and Hilary Pyle have sought to prove that he was born on 9 February 1880 (and that his father died when Stephens was two), but they have only circumstantial evidence to present. Some critics believe that he changed his birthdate to coincide with that of Joyce; but his stepdaughter states that his birthday was always celebrated on 2 February, and his friendship with Joyce came fourteen years after his use, in 1913, of the birthdate generally accepted for him. It may also be the case that his family name was not Stephens, that he selected the name to

do honour to the great Fenian leader James Stephens.

He may have been the James Stephens who was an orphan living in the Meath Protestant Industrial School for Boys in Dublin from 1886 to 1896. He certainly was the Stephens on the Dawson Street Gymnastic Club when it won the Irish Shield in 1901. He worked as a stenographer in a variety of offices – most of which are unknown – from 1896 to 1906. It is only in 1907, when Stephens became a published author and the head of a household, that his life can be traced.

In later years, he continued to spin stories of his youth. The fragment of a manuscript which follows is undated. It may be viewed as autobiography or fiction; in either case it is an interesting glimpse of the artist as a young man.

Autobiographical Fragment

I had begun to write and had been for quite a time a solitary person, and, for quite a time, a solitary writer. When I had finished something that pleased me, a short story, a few verses, I would put such into an envelope, and drop it into the letter-box of Arthur Griffith's weekly paper. I dropped these into the editor's letter-box with my name duly signed, but with no address given, for I was certain that, while he would delight in my writings he could not possibly bother about who I was or what I looked like, or where I lived. Then, the week after, I would buy my pennyworth of that paper, and gloat over my contribution to it, admiring my vocabulary, which said, within reason, almost anything I demanded of it, astounded at the grammar which I had never striven for, and yet was mine, but more admiring, more astounded yet, at the fact that my matters were accepted by the great editor, and that everything I sent him was printed the very week next after its receipt.

The first, enthusiastic main of my reading in this journal was given to my own writings in it. Each of these I read and re-read twenty times, perhaps more, and the surprise I felt on seeing my very own name, black, and large, and printed, at the foot of my contribution was so great as to be almost hypnotic. I used to gaze upon that name and go with it into a complete solitude, wherein was nothing but my own self, and my infinite astonishment at me: then I would re-read my contribution, and marvel anew that neither God nor the Pope, but I only had written it, and that it verily was printed.

Next having (not exhausted, but) thoroughly identified my writing with its author, and its author with all magnificence, I would read the rest of the paper, coming, in such readings, week by week upon names, all kinds of names, wonderful names. I saw that the news of the world is made up of the names of people, and that who does not know people or their names is sundered from all events, and cannot at all discuss them. These names as they recurred

began slowly to acquire character, temperament, talent. There were verses by Yeats, Russell, O'Sullivan, Synge, Colum, Susan Mitchell; and prose by these, and by an host of others; and I knew, bathing my soul in that eager prose and lovely eager verse, that every one of these writers knew, and by an hundred-fold, more than I upon every subject whatever, and I marvelled how it was possible for mere human creatures to know so much and so many as these did, and to write with amplitude and cogency upon all things, all peoples, all events.

I knew, and 'tis a very remarkable knowledge, that there were matters I could write upon as 'twere from the fount of knowledge itself; and that I had never experienced these matters troubled me nothing. Love and hate and jealousy: hope and terror and a complete carelessness of both: a certain contained frenzy of laughter, and a something, not the extremity of but the continuation of these, and called tears were things I needed not to study, nor be advised on. I knew them without any experience at all.

In the matter of knowledge I was, and knew it, but carelessly, the least knowledgeable of creatures – I knew words like lyric, epic, sonnet, and could use them, but I did not know what these words meant, nor suspect that they had definite, even rigorous, meanings. Definite meanings, and precise information, were matters that did not cloud my days or my pages until long afterwards. I relied upon what I felt like, or upon what I remembered having felt like. I might have held had I been questioned that nothing should or could be felt or written of except at its extreme, and that the extreme of joying or suffering and the expression of these required nothing else than to be written of as at that extremity.

Violence is the gymnastic of youth, and even is its grace. It cannot [do] away with the definite, the precise, and must look on these as retardings and pretentious pedantries. Still reading the articles in my journal – resumé's of political, economic, social events and significances: reading articles critical of, or, in so far as might be, explanatory of, Yeats and Moore and Shaw, the plays current in our Theatres, the established reputations and the newest books, events and the trendings of these I began to see that a furnishing of actual information, the equivalent of the next man's, was necessary if one were to enter the game at all, and that for the lack of this I was incapable of reviewing even a novel, to say nothing of a book of verse. I despaired for an interminable moment, and encouraged myself in the moment immediately succeeding it. I began to educate

myself. That is I began to read with extraordinary violence the books which I hated and I dropped, as upon a stroke, all the readings I had hitherto loved. I dropped Ouida and Marie Corelli and Rd. Marsh and Conan Doyle and Seton Merriman and Anthony Hope and Stanley Weyman and W. W. Jacobs and who-not-soever-else of the admirable tribes, and instead tried to Dickens and Thackeray and Brontë-et-all-myself, at speed. I could not away with them. Dickens was to me a perfectly marvellous foreigner: he could delight assuredly, and as certainly could he disgust me: he had no tact, no manners, no self-respect, and nothing even resembling respect for others; he mixed all his breeds. (I had been trained to take my hat off if a beggerman spoke to me, and to address him as Sir.) Thackeray I conceived of as an unmitigated bore, and worse, an unreadable one! There was no bottom and no top to his world: it was a one-dimensional fantasy, wherein was no God, no devil, no wisdom, no ambition, composed mainly of the two most complete horrors which can beset an art or a civilization – humour, and its equally stupid other-end, pathos. Of the Brontës, Jane Austen, Trollope I thought the person who can read this must have no blood in his veins, no urgency in his soul, and a leisure interminable as a wet Sunday. I quit these all on the first page – and only years later did I rediscover them. I rediscovered Charlotte Brontë in Paris five years later, and liked Clement Shorter thereupon, because he liked her: and I called out of a window in the rue Campagne Ire upon the eighth month of the great war that *Villette* was the greatest novel of Charlotte, and that Charlotte was the greatest novelist on earth. But that and the Trollope of *Barchester* was later – I dropped the lot of them, and in pursuit of brains, I declined and fell with the immeasurable Gibbon. I Plutarched with all these lives. I French-revolutionized with Carlyle. Very quietly but very rapidly I found myself in a condition of intellectual excitement so extreme that it would be impossible to describe it, and will be sufficient to indicate it as that which I loved – the extreme. In these I found the extreme, but taken in its stages. The extreme, looked at, come to, come to grips with, known, and disciplined, and elevated to its proper servitude. With these, for I was ever a terrific reader, I read Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall and Grant Allen, who not, and a dozen others whom I have forgotten of that persuasion – not one of them being less than a good man, everyone of them, what now we could call, a great man, and with these I mixed – for entertainment, for solace, for help, for the getting back to my own kind, Meredith, and Hardy,

and when I could, origins! Wells. There were others, but I have forgotten them. Meredith came upon me as a complete astonishment. It seemed almost as if a gentleman and a scholar – 'tis a rarer combination than we care to admit – was writing, not as the disparate two, but as one completely unified and masterly personage. I read *The Egoist* six times, each time admiring Meredith more, and beginning each time to hate him more. I thought – this is the most cruel writer that ever got hold of a pen. The way he, having created him, has treated this Egoist of his, more than child of his flesh, or bone of his bone, inner and very essence of his own brain and mind and creative soul. I both would not and could not thus treat a dog. I read Hardy, and decided that Hardy of *Jude the Obscure*, and another was, (with George Moore) the most ignorant 'great' writer that has ever lived: was the most 'peasant' writer, perhaps the only one, who has ever dared letters, and got away with something neighbouring literacy. His effect derives from an inadequate cause, but his effect is so imposed that one forgets the horrible inadequacy of its cause. But his locus is so founded. There is such clay in his fields: such boulders in his quarry, such milk in his cows: such thews in his men: such bosom in his women, indeed his very moon shines as with moonlight, and his rain is damp and drips on the market-square. It would not be impossible to assert him as the top of all who preceded, and as unchallenged by any who came after him. But, – he had no philosophy, or his entire philosophy was drawn from the Old Testament: he could not conceive in terms of crime and punishment of a good and evil, and, in very especial, of retribution. Artistically, he was a genius, intellectually he was a peasant. Emotion and tradition and an helpless rage within these, upheld him, and let him down. He is England's only great peasant, as George Moore is Ireland's only great peasant (Blake, perhaps, should be so considered in verse). Peasant writers are not strong in cause and effect, and the adventurous identity of these. Their idea, briefly, is to make someone they love suffer, and Hardy did this with everyone he loved. The peasant makes, and must make, someone he loves suffer: even his God must suffer, and shamefully, if that too can be contrived. In this, but at what a distance, he meets his great extreme, the classical writer: they too adventure in suffering, but not in shame. I was inclined to think that *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was the most shapely novel in English: that Moore's *The Lake* was the most limpidly written piece of fiction in English: that *Crime and Punishment* was the greatest novel in the world: that the Balzac of

Cousine Bette was the greatest novelist of the world though not the writer of the greatest novel. That *Hadrian the Seventh* was the nearest thing to a scholarly, sensitive and imaginative work in English: that prose (fiction) written as by a gentleman did not at all exist in English.

Prose Writings: 1907

James Stephens' first published work, 'The Seoinin', is an essay more notable for its insistent patriotism than its prose style. The article appeared in *Sinn Féin* on 20 April 1907; following it in the same year were five essays, three poems, and three short stories. The seven pieces of uncollected prose in this section mark the beginning of two of Stephens' great love affairs: with Ireland and with writing.*

The early essays divide into topical categories – patriotism and poetry – but cross references abound: poets are exhorted to be true to their country's language, history, and heroes; citizens are urged to learn Gaelic, remember the deeds of Irish warriors and read Irish writers. Given their place of publication, the proselytizing nature of the essays is not surprising; the editor of *Sinn Féin*, the political leader Arthur Griffith, was happy to receive articles with a strong, nationalistic bent.

The lines of influence in these works can be easily traced. William Blake inspires the following:

The wisdom of the serpent cannot be allied to the harmlessness of the dove, but the wisdom of a wise man can be allied to the artlessness of a child; and the difference between these two estates is the difference between Wisdom and Cunning.

(‘Poetry’)

And Arthur Griffith echoes in these words:

It is not on the ruins, but on the foundations of the past that the pinnacles of the future can be erected with any degree of solidity, and only by conserving the bravery, the energy, the poetry, and the worth of our ancestors can ourselves and our posterity be other than a nation of illiterates, quacks, and barbarians.

(‘Builders’)

* Only seven pieces of prose are reprinted here because two of the short stories, ‘Mrs Jerry Gorman’ and ‘Miss Arabella Hennessy’, were included, in a modified form, in *Here Are Ladies*.

Writing to a correspondent in 1917, James Stephens recalled his first years as a contributor to *Sinn Féin*:

I wrote first in a National paper here for some years, it is in that kind of school most of us have appeared. Papers, that is, which never pay their contributors (they couldn't) and which are read by a curious mingling of intelligentsia and patriots who may be barmen or shopmen or coalheavers.

(*Letters*, p. 204)

Stephens' accommodations to this eclectic audience may explain the odd mixture of sophistication and simplicity behind the admonitions in his early essays: Irish people shouldn't believe the London *Times* story that they have tails; they shouldn't cultivate English accents or manners; Irish women shouldn't wear foreign apparel, read English novels, sing English songs, or even speak English; both women and men should be more charitable toward the poor and hungry, and should condemn jails and workhouses; they should not sing songs which are degrading of the Irish nation or name animals or objects after the saga heroes; they should forget about Robin Hood and the Knights of the Round Table and thrill to the exploits of Ruari O'Moore and the heroes of the Red Branch.

The villain of these pieces is the 'Seoinin', or West Briton – the Irishman who is not only ignorant and unappreciative of his past, but admiring of all things English. This personage figures prominently in several of the pieces; in his short story, for example, Agnes M'Quillan's brother Percy, an unrepentant West Briton, is thrown out of the house when Maurice embraces the Irish cause.

While stumbling over the excess of punctuation marks and the rambling thought patterns, the reader may wish to keep in mind the story – probably invented by Stephens – of his first quarrel with James Joyce:

Here Joyce woke up: he exploded moderately into conversation. He turned his chin and his specs at me, and away down at me, and confided the secret to me that he had read my two books; that, grammatically, I did not know the difference between a semi-colon and a colon: that my knowledge of Irish life was non-Catholic and, so, non-existent, and that I should give up writing and take a good job like shoe-shining as a more promising profession.

(*James, Seumas & Jacques*, p. 149)

The essays are apprentice work, but they reflect certain interests and animadversions which appear throughout Stephens' works—a belief in a national consciousness for Ireland, an exploration of human emotions, and a dislike for symbols of societal repression. Moreover, they are samples of Stephens' wry humour and his dedication to his craft.

The Seoinin

Generally speaking, the Seoinin belongs neither to the aristocracy nor to the people – he or she, for unfortunately the female Seoinin predominates, is held in solution between the classes and the masses and approximates to neither. The Seoinin has received just sufficient education to make it patent to the observer that he or she is ignorant, and his or her ignorance is of a special type. There are some people who are ignorant in grain and there are more who are ignorant through misfortune. Neither of these, however, are ignorant in the same direction or with the same bulk as the Seoinin. The Sage who said that ‘a little learning is a dangerous thing,’ spoke one of the best aphorisms ever uttered by man. (Women incidentally don’t make proverbs, they make the stuff out of which proverbs are made.) He might, however, have written that a little learning is an ignorant thing, for that is how the matter stands. The person who knows that the earth is round, because he has been told so, or that the world is kept in motion by energy and force acting through matter, without understanding what either energy, force, or matter is, does not really know that the world is round or in motion at all, and is in danger of developing into an ignorant person; but, he knows that he knows something other people may not know, and the miraculous possession of, not knowledge, but information, in a head that is barren by nature, gives him a perverted judgment and a swelled cranium. Swelled heads and perverted judgments travel together. If you loom largely on your own horizon, other facts, not quite so important as yourself, will be out of focus; and you will have an obliquity of vision in your mentalities.

The Seoinin learned whatever he knows out of print, and being a simple-minded but obstinate person, he elevates print into a fetish and unhesitatingly accepts printed matter for truth, a thing which it seldom is, being only symbols of men’s thoughts, which, as we all know, are not invariably dictated by the worthiest motives. Not so very long ago the English *Times*, during a serious crux in Irish history, gravely and seriously informed their readers that an

Irishman's backbone was elongated into something more than a rudimentary tail, the mark of the beast, quoth the *Times*. That the average Englishman, rampantly credulous as he is, and misinformed as he was and is on Irish matters, should believe this, is no subject for wonderment, but that Irishmen should believe it does seem strange, but with the Seoinin the obsession of print will lead him to believe anything, except truth, which is, of course, naked, indecent and not respectable, and yet the man was an Irishman, knew he had no tail himself, and did not know of any Irishman that had. These facts, however, in no wise interfered with his easy credulity. The thing was there in print, and in the *Times*; the majestic and respectable Government Thunderer, and so the Seoinin believed it and probably boasted of it, for the Seoinin has only a rudimentary sense of proportion.

There is another fetish before which the Seoinin abases himself involuntarily and gladly—Respectability. Good clothes and a cultivated accent quickly bend the supple joints of the admiring Seoinin, and here, again, the poor man is in trouble, for he is unable to discriminate between good clothes and middling good ones, or between a good accent and the laboured lunacy that is sometimes used in mistake for it. Good clothes with him generally argues a good accent, and any grocer's curate from Manchester who visits this country for a week's vacation in order to study the habits of the Wild Irishry in their native bogs is generally accepted by the Seoinin as a shining intellectual star and a model of gentlemanly deportment. Our distinguished visitor dilates on the magnificence of England, 'the w'ite walls h'of h'old h'England,' and remarks, as a result of his first evening's dissipation, that 'you h'Irish hif you were not'—or perhaps, was not—'so drunken in your abits and so dispritley iggerent in your 'eads, wouldn't be 'aff a bad sawt,' and the Seoinin smiles approval, not understanding that the man has just insulted him and everything that is his.

If the Seoinin were an isolated accident it would not matter much, but, unfortunately, this is not the case, more unfortunately, he is rapidly becoming an institution under the able leadership of the Miss Henrietta Maguires and the Misses Rosalind and Beatrice Murphy. I think it would not be too much to say that the great majority of Irishwomen who live in towns are Seoinini and anti-Irish in every respect except when the wit of a Dublin carman is to be pitted against the wit of the travelling Sassanach, when she will be proud of her country. The reason for this is not, however, far to

seek, neither is the remedy. Woman's natural, and indeed laudable, love of dress and adornment is not catered for in this country, her dress and her ornaments, her scents, shoelaces, trinkets, and so forth, are foreign, consequently, the foreigner by association takes on an air of fal lal culture, that is lacking, thank heaven, from her own country. Her emotions have been perverted, she does not think Irish or feel Irish, but she does not feel English or think English either, although she fondly imagines she does. She is neither fish, fowl, nor good red herring, she is neither here, there, nor yonder. She is betwixt and between like a toper at the sixth half one, neither drunk nor sober, but unable to say just which of the two lampposts he sees he should dodge.

This is all the fault of the suicidal system of education under which this country seeks darkness rather than light, and planted here for this very end. Our fellow-countrywoman in her youth learns her lessons, such as they are, in English, she sings her songs, such as they are, in English, says her prayers and conducts her courtships through the same foreign medium; is saturated through and through with foolish and weak English ideals twenty times diluted by reading tenth-class English novels wherein bad language, bad taste, bad sentiment, and bad morals are plastered together with blood and pseudo bravery. Her heroes are all English, and all she knows of villainy she is carefully taught to believe comes direct from her native country. England, in her belief, exports us heroes, tears, and poetry, while Ireland sends back cattle with mutilated tails and Popery in the English sense. And yet, when one comes to look into the motives that sway human beings, one is forced to ask is the Irishwoman wrong? The sexes all through nature act and interact on each other, mutually sway and balance each other. If women act in a certain manner the reason generally is that men wish them to do so, and when men act in another certain manner it is because women, who are so often the audience to men's work and lives applaud the action. Continual years of oppression, suppression, and expression have succeeded in almost slaying Irish ideals without giving birth to anything but very thin and skimpy English ones. This, however, is a fact, that so long as Irishwomen speak the English language, read English poets, and are courted in the English tongue, just so long will Ireland be a provincial and vulgar imitation of London. The fault is the Irishman's. He, as the stronger, should by nature take the initiative; should, if not rule, at least walk a step in advance in order to kill mice and bogies of

whatever nation or denomination, and until he learns Gaelic the girls will not be bothered with it, and his children will still be West Britons, grumblers, quacks, flash folk, and hybrids.

Sinn Féin

20 April 1907

Builders

The outward and visible sign of a healthy and prosperous nation is this, that no man, sunk in whatever lower pit of poverty he may be, can there die of hunger, or be classed as a criminal when the weight of years has bent him nearer to the tomb and further from his labour. The spiritual sign of a healthy and wise nation is this, that its great men, its poets, statesmen, warriors, and martyrs are patent and lively units in its civilization, living in the popular mind, not as legends, but as men who were once as we are, living, sentient, breathing men, who looked on the same mountains, fished in the same streams, walked on the same dales, played as children with the same abandon, paid court as lovers with the same ardour, loved their country with the same intensity, hated the common enemy with the same abhorrence, and went to the grave and beyond with the same peaceful hope as we, the issue of their blood, perform and will perform these natural and national functions.

Judged by either of these standards, let the impartial observer say, if his heart will allow his tongue to do so, in what state of either happiness or healthiness this our country is. Are our poor in any danger from hunger? Alas, those direst gaols, miscalled workhouses, those pestilent infirmities of any state, can tell in round numbers of the hereditary starvers, who come into the world sucking optimistically at empty bosoms, trudge through it, sucking disconsolately at empty pipes and finish it grimly sucking their empty gums and slink away, with a return to optimism, thinking that anyhow they cannot be much worse off than this wherever they go. And on the other count, are our heroes enshrined in our memories, in our songs, our

proverbs, our civilisation? Do we rear statues towards the heavens to commemorate their deeds, and call our children after their illustrious names? I have heard of a yacht called Oscar, of a horse called Finn, and of a dog call Oisin.

Alas, alas and alas!
For the once proud people of Banba.

And yet our country has been peculiarly prolific of great men, as we human and imperfect beings must count greatness, men who were not afraid, that is the whole sum of human greatness. Not to be afraid to live and account to your fellow man, an exacting and perilous duty, and ultimately, not afraid to die and account to your God, perhaps not quite so desperate an adventure as is widely believed.

To attempt to classify our heroes and put each on his proper heroic plane, giving the entree here, precedence there, and a back seat yonder, would be an undertaking in which bad taste and foolishness would be very equally allied, but there are some of our National heroes who, by their untiring endeavours, by the strangeness of their adventures, and, perhaps, the chance of historical chronology, appeal more quickly to our emotions or our love of romance, than do others equally heroic—these names should in Irish homes be ‘familiar in the ears as household words.’ They should to us be symbolic of the Irish race and all that the Irish race stands for. It is not on the ruins, but on the foundations of the past that the pinnacles of the future can be erected with any degree of solidity, and only by conserving the bravery, the energy, the poetry, and the worth of our ancestors can ourselves and our posterity be other than a nation of illiterates, quacks, and barbarians.

Real progress is the conservation of energy propelled from behind, and travelling along a certain strongly defined path towards some definite goal. Success attained in any other manner is the veriest waftage of chance—Progress does not mean side-shunting. A railway engine travelling swiftly and smoothly along its rails is an admirable and concrete form of progress, but take it off its rails, give it all the steam it requires, and let it run into the wide world, and what progress does it make? What is its success? It ceased to be a railway engine, and becomes an engine of destruction, leaving chaos and disaster in its wake, scattering terror from its funnel, and after its progress of misery and horror has spread

desolation about it, its mad success ends in its own destruction. That is the success that Ireland for the past fifty years has been striving for. We have been taken off the rails of National Progress and set running blindly on an English road which we know nothing of and detest instinctively; and the chaos, which is the outcome of that extraordinary perambulation, has been most widespread amongst ourselves. Travelling along this foreign road we have already lost sight of our propelling power. The heroes we are taught to revere are not Conn of the Battles or Oisín of the Songs. What do we know of Conn of the Battles? A few dim memories are written down in books that we never read, and which are claimed by Englishmen as English literature written by West-Britons. And the songs of Oisín – in *Tir na n-og*, perhaps, they are still sung to the harp and the pipe; but in *Tir na nGaedheal* we sing Mat Hannigan's Aunt and Beer, Glorious Beer. We have lost sight of Finn the Champion, Osgar the Sworder, Goll the grim, flail-wielding son of Morna, and the Hound of Culain. We have lost these, the strength of our blood, the flame of our hearts, and what have we got in exchange? We have got Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh, and the Outlaw of Sherwood we have, and the Knights of the Round Table. Were the heroes of the Red Branch less than the Knights of the Round Table, or Eamonn of the Hills inferior to Robin Hood, or Ruari O'Moore and the princely O'Neill less perfect gentlemen or less fearless warriors than Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh? Did Raftery not know how to sing a song that we must fly to Jonson or Suckling.

The nation is very much off the track, and its environment is chaos. We threw our honour into England's lap, and her Thackerays have handed it back to us in a series of pictures representing the most unscrupulous and mean-minded adventurers in her literature. We threw our noble and melodious language into her smelting pot, and she purified it and returned it for our proud approbation, as *badad*, *begum*, *begorrah*, *bejabers*, and *bejasus*, and we surrendered our nationality to England, and what did we get for the proud, the fiery and poetic spirit of the Gael? In return for our Nationality, England has painted us to every European Nation as a country whose chief physical distinctions are, that we have a pimple instead of a nose, that our mouths are of such magnitude and elasticity, that we can with ease bite both of our ears at the same moment, that our foreheads are formed on the model of a baboon, that our streets have to be built very wide to enable our huge and unwieldy feet to walk in them, that our brains are what might be

expected after these physical peculiarities, that our personal habits are filthy even to beastliness, that the society of a pig is preferred by us beyond commerce with our fellow men, that we sleep in indiscriminate herds like cattle, and awake with yells like wolves, that we slay inoffensive strangers with our teeth and nails, and finally that we are Yahoos, whose only redeeming traits are a sense of humour and a snarl.

That is the success our progress has brought us to, and some people, Seoinini to wit, profess to be perfectly satisfied with it. But, thank Heaven, there are yet, even in Eire, some few who have not bent the knee to Baal, and there are others who recognise the horror of their position and are striving desperately to find the true road that leads to the wide kind arms of Caitlin Ni Houlihan, and this for their guidance – the strong, kind arms of Caitlin will never receive you unless you can understand her Song, and she sings in the Gaelic.

Sinn Féin

11 May 1907

Patriotism and Parochial Politics

Once a person, a cadaverous gentleman with a knobby forehead, heavy feet, and a simper, said to me: 'Why should a man be patriotic? What practical utility is it to him or his fellow-man that he should rabidly adore the small portion of land wherein he chanced to be born? Why should he not adopt the Larger Outlook, and dismissing all finicking and absurd boundaries, whether of ocean wave, mountain chain, or imaginary equatorial line, announce his birth-place as the earth, and himself a patriotic citizen of the Universe? Why,' said Querist, with the perspiration teeming off his knobby brow and his simper in eclipse, 'why should he blatantly and nonsensically proclaim that the small round of mould, within whose bounds he happened to be generated, is the best, the brightest, the

noblest, and the happiest piece of earth to be found within the confines of the Sphere? Why,' quoth he, 'should a Frenchman, travelled or otherwise, conspire against the peace and unity of the world by trumpeting, that in France the skies are clearer, the women are fairer, the men are braver, the soil more productive, the saintly men more holy, and the criminals more Satanic than in any other nation on earth. Then the Spaniard, twirling his inky mustachios, says, "St Denis, pooh, St James, and Charge Spain," and Italy says, "Whatever good came to man was born of me among the vines"; and America drawls, "Boston is the hub of the Universe," and a thousand years ago an Irish warrior said: "I would not exchange a stone from the meanest hill-side in dear Eirinn for the inheritance of the Ard Ri of the world. All this," says my friend, prodding the index finger of his right hand half an inch from my nose, 'is egotism, egotism in its most rampant and abhorrent form. Because you happened to be born here the place must be inundated in the special grace of God, of which grace you are apparently the flower in bloom – egotism, egotism,' he thunders. 'Pure selfishness and barbarism. Call yourself an Earthian, and to the devil with petty distinctions and parochialities. Then, perhaps, the golden age will have arrived, and Jason will bring home the Fleece. The lion will travel with the lamb (inside passage). The sword will adhere to the sheath through the attraction of rust. The winepress will be red with the grape instead of clotted with the blood of your brothers. Happiness will be at last possible, and the rate-payer will stand drinks to the tax gatherer.' All of which I admitted was very lucid, very pretty, and very foolish, and proceeded to reason with him with such force and cogency of argument, that he sought the protection of a policeman.

Whether through intellectual laziness, satiety of argument, or lack of brain power the practice nowadays seems to be one of dismissing all arguable themes with a phrase or a set of phrases. Says Terence to Liam: 'What do you think of predestination, Liam?' 'Predestination! Oh, predestination be jiggered,' says Liam. 'And the Court's with you,' rejoins Terence, 'what's your drink?' Or Seaghan, who believes he is a thinker because he wears spectacles, will ask Michael, 'What do you think the spots on the sun are?' And Michael replies cheerfully, 'Pockmarks; it's possible frog blossoms, it's likely.' Then the newspapers have all their little formulae, which are always popping up in the most unlikely places, such as 'rights of property and rights of man, ventilation of grievances, necessary

restrictions, esprit de corps, and honour among thieves, parochial politics, and thinking for nations'; all very neat and compact labour-saving devices, which by now, however, are about sufficiently worn to be cast aside as mere intellectual lumber, too old to be useful, and not old enough to be curious.

But Patriotism is not to be dethroned by an antagonistic phrase. It is not the rights of man you need to talk about. It is the wrongs of man that are crying for all your eloquence, and similarly world politics can be safely left to evolve unaided if we give all our attention and the heat of our hearts to the much maligned Parochial Politics.

If you come to think the matter over, you will, perhaps, find that you love your country for the same reason that you love your father and your mother. That, indeed, your country is your father and your mother. That the ashes of your parents, and of your grandparents, and of all the long intricate line of your ancestry, down to the remotest mist-hidden ages of antiquity, are interred and bosomed in your land. That every piece of dust, every stone and clod of earth in the country, has gone to help somehow in the making of you. That not a tree in it tossing its green head among the breezes, but is quickened with the same sap that quickens through yourself. That through the long and complex interchange of marriage, every man and woman in it are in reality and truth your brothers and your sisters. That every blade of grass in it is living through the death of your people nourished on their decay; and is you in a vegetable form, that every tree and rock, flower and animal in it are kin to you, and that in fact the land is your mother; and everything in it, vegetable, mineral, or human, are members of your great family; and when you yourself die, you hope that you will go back to her peaceful breast, and aid her by your death in giving life to successive generations.

Every nation has its own personal peculiarities and virtues drawn from the soil of its country, and only existing on that soil, and if a man attempts to travel outside the road of these virtues, he ceases to be in harmony with Nature. Let him go howl among the rocks, for he is a lost man, and will never have place to rest his head until he returns to Nature the misfit spirit he never had a right to possess.

The world is a majestic hymn of praise, and in that great paeon every nation has its distinctive note, and be very sure, if one of them is singing out of tune, the Lord of the Music will be asking why.

There is no such thing as cosmopolitanism – though a man know

two or twenty languages, though he be able to ask for bread and bed in every city of the world – he has only one home whether he knows it or not, only one place where he can really enjoy either bread or bed, and that place is his native land; in whose lap the clay of his fathers was kneaded, and to whom the clay that composes him belongs.

Sinn Féin

25 May 1907

Irish Englishmen

That men should love their country and be proud of it and for it, is such a common and universal thing as to call for no expression of either surprise or approbation. From the time when history first began to take cognizance of and classify the motives that impel men towards regimentation, Patriotism has been lauded and sung as the first of the virtues, and without the leaven of which all other virtues are wanting. The Unit has always lived for the Mass. The idea of the individual has been subordinated to the idea of the State – that is patriotism, and when the subordination is complete and absolute, then the State is healthy.

It has been left for later generations and an intensely patriotic people to show the reverse of the medal, the other side of the moon; and to exhibit patriotism afflicted with the most demoniacal squint that an abstract countenance ever looked side-ways with. This miracle is known as a West-Briton. He stands fore-front to God and man square, squat, saturnine, and silly, and doesn't appear to know that he is sufficiently funny to tickle the risibility of the equator.

What is the case? Here is an Irishman, born in Ireland, living in Ireland, living by Ireland, and destined to die in Ireland, never having been out of Ireland and never going to be; nurtured in the most famous part of our land where the greatest of our poets have sung, the greatest of our warriors fought, and the greatest of our saints have prayed: where every hill and stone and tree is almost vocal with traditional glory, over every copse, valley, and hedge of

which fame hangs like a vestment; and yet the only feeling he has for his country or his countrymen is hatred. He can shout 'God save England' with a will and lungs of brass, but 'God save Ireland'? he'd die first, as he might himself put it – 'Like a soldier and a man.'

All his patriotism is exhibited against his patrie, his home is abroad, his enemies are his friends, he is patriotic for foreigners, he is a stranger in his own house, and is at home where he is not wanted. He smiles when God and man would have him scowl, and scowls when his arms should be open. He spits on the beard of his father and tears the robe from his mother, pointing a lewd finger at her nakedness, and laboriously cultivates the stolid virtues in the interim.

He is not ignorant by any means; but he is as economical with his brains as he is with his money, fearing apparently that his middle age will be both penniless and senile, bankrupt in pocket and in hat, down at heel and down at head. The doctrine of Utilitarianism has been so ground into him that he thinks in assets. The narrow, puritanic method of his culture has robbed him of most of the lighter joys of life, and the intolerant and false education that he receives has left him with an unplumbable ignorance of his country, its history, and its people. He has wrought so for his native land that to-day Ireland might be geographically described as the most westerly point of Europe, abounding in bogs and mementoes of King William, and densely inhabited by policemen.

If he was pinned to a definition he could not tell what he is. Geographical reasons prevent him calling himself an Englishman, shame will not allow him to embrace the appellation of Irishman; he hangs in solution an eighth wonder of the world. Though he has no root name, he yet has a postal address, he is a 'Northerner,' a tail with no comet, a provincial of nowhere.

He carries the throne of England in his tobacco pouch and the Protestant religion in his waistcoat pocket, and his life is rendered melancholy and jumpy in guarding these treasures; but, withal, he is not as bad as folk try to make him out – he is worse.

His great argument against the liberty of his country is 'that Irishmen don't know how to govern themselves.' He has heard and repeated this so often that he believes it is one of the 39 Articles only absent from the Book of Common Prayer through a printer's error, and is not quite sure whether it was first enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount or engraved by the finger of God on the Mosaic tablets.

Wherever there are twelve men gathered together there are at least three brains capable of guiding their fortunes, seven who acquiesce in their government, and two who, by being rebellious, keep the whole sweet and clean and active; and one of the three holding the reins of government is a traitor, two of the seven governed are fools, and one of the rebels is an artist or a poet. That is a State in brief, and the action of those different minds tend for progress as they militate against stagnation.

There was never heard of in the world a nation that was incapable of gauging its wants and finding a means of supplying them. That is government in a nutshell.

The man that can drive a butcher's shop to prosperity can push a kingdom a long way on the same road. A butcher and a prime minister are both vertebrate animals, equal in most things, saving, perhaps, table manners.

Why, Sir Northerner, do you foul your own nest? Have you arrived at your conclusions as to the limitations of your countrymen after trepanning the western savages, or have you confined your experiments to a destructive criticism of your own brains? If you belittle us you are dwarfing yourself. Is your head as waterlogged as you say? Is your business going to rack and ruin because you are a congenital idiot, or are things going pretty fair although you are constitutionally incapable of governing yourself?

Friend, and more than friend, the Prince of Orange is dead, and the bones of that great man are long dust of the dust. The world has wandered far from his tomb, and vows by his graveside are unavailable. He is dead, and the tuck of the drum cannot rouse his mouldered ears, but Erie is alive. Let the dead past bury its dead. You stood for a principle and stood well, but you have outlived that principle, and are now only beating the air where phantoms move. Come with us and fight for the underdog. Brother, quit the half-way house wherein you are lodging and come home. Even if it is a little untidy, you and we together could quickly set it to rights. It is a beautiful home, and the woman of the house, Caitlin, the daughter of Houlihan, is a pleasant and a kind woman, a wise woman, too, and a tender, you would find a strange joy in watching her worn face grow mild and beautiful again. Once she wore a crown worthily, her brow still is queenly, though she is now called the Poor Old Woman, the Sean bhean bhocht, her helpers are feeble and few, her enemy is a giant, a monster that blocks out the sun and threatens grimly, but though seven hundred years of horror has

blanched her hair and lined her face, she has never blenched, never given in, that should make a man's heart hot with love and anger. Whisper, too, a thing you have forgotten, she is The Mother, your mother and ours, the word should have a tender and holy significance for men. Come home, brother, you have drunk from the same breast as we, the one lap has cradled us, let us plough our fields and shear our sheep together. The silk of the kine will give milk again. Our corn will be golden in the barns. We will dance in the cross-roads in the evenings. Our children will laugh in the sunlight. Herself will be proud again.

Sinn Féin
1 June 1907

Poetry

That the poet is born, not made, is so well-worn a statement as to scarcely merit the compliment of repetition, but repetition is needful nevertheless, for in spite, or perhaps because of, the frequency of the statement, the contrary is generally believed. The tritest observation is generally the least understood. What everybody says nobody believes. The lips are nearer to the feet than the brain. Truth looks like the twin brother of a lie, and in the sinewy language of a friend of mine, facts are too damned logical by half.

It scarcely happens once during the progress of a century that a poet is born, but at least twice a week during that period a poet is made, recognised, admired, and whisked into Chaos and empty Nox, 'unwept, unhonoured, and unsung,' and the last is the calamity, for quotation marks are the hall-marks of poetry. The poet that is unquotable is as dead as Pharaoh. Let him be apropos or change his trade.

True poetry is the union of Wisdom with Melody; neither of which are complex at their best, but are based on a big, broad Simplicity.

The wisdom of the serpent cannot be allied to the harmlessness of the dove, but the wisdom of a wise man can be allied to the

artlessness of a child; and the difference between these two estates is the difference between Wisdom and Cunning.

We are told by various philosophic people that life is daily becoming more and more complex. That is not true. Life is to-day just as simple as it was a thousand years ago. We can travel quicker along our roads, we have a wider variety of foods wherewith to stay our hunger, we have more news, that is all; and none of these things really influence our lives and their simplicity. We can only eat when we are hungry, however varied and tempting the viands; only travel till we are tired, however exhilarating the speed, only gossip till we are sleepy, however piquant the scandal. Men died of hunger in Baghdad and Nineveh as they die of hunger in London and Paris. Men courted and married and were true and false to their wives in Sodom and Gomorrah as they do in Dublin and Berlin. Long ago in Egypt Joseph, the son of Jacob, made a successful corner in wheat, and to-day in America men are making a corner in wheat also; and neither Joseph of the East nor Jonathan of the West are greatly troubled by the misery their rapaciousness entails. Man, so far as we know, is just as good or as bad as he ever was. History shows neither advance nor retrogression in virtue. If we change at all it is in geologic periods. God's hour is a long one.

Life is simple enough, and this is life: Our adventures in search of our daily bread: and dire and terrible enough these are, God knows. Our adventures in search of our wives: and joyous and frightful these are also, as joyous and as frightful to-day as when, long ago, Jacob met Rebecca at the well and was glad; or when David admired Bathsheba, and put her husband in the forefront of the battle to his death – and our adventures in search of adventure: when we walk, wide-eyed, through the Fields of Romance looking for Happiness, a thing that never existed and never will, the legendary Ghost of Nothing.

Hunger and thirst, love and hate, the kindness of the human heart and the cruelty of the same, the starry width of the sky and the broad, woeful ocean, the grass, the trees and the birds, the spider waiting in his filmy house, and the gnat winging his minute path through space unterrified and thoughtless and propagating safely his microscopic kind – these are life and those complexities we hear so much of are but foolishness and vexation, things of the smallest moment that the waywardness of man's mind and the mad trend of a civilisation have elevated into bogies.

Let the poet walk wide of these things, that are not things but lies,

phantasms, and mist. His business is with the things that are, the things that matter, the steadfast things—the joys and sorrows of man, the wondrous love of woman, the delight of victory, the bitterness of defeat. The brave Songs of the Sunlight, the sadly, sweet Verse of the Twilight, the dark, cold quietness of the Night Time, when the terrible bats go hunting, and the wonder of the big, dead Moon.

Poetry does not consist in mastery of the metric or literary faculty, that is easy enough to one with a fair memory, a big vocabulary, and a good ear. The poet must have the seeing eye, the comprehending brain, the sympathetic heart. Observation, Comprehension, Sympathy, these added to the literary and musical faculties make the poet, and while observation and the literary faculty may be learned, comprehension and sympathy cannot, and these last constitute Wisdom—the first asset of the poet.

All the schools of the world cannot make a wise man, they may make a knowing man a learned man, but it takes God Almighty to make a Wise Man. Take away your lesson books, your primers, and your lexicons, what has this man to do with your printed foolishness, he will translate your lessons into a language you cannot understand. He reads the flowers and the trees, the wet lips of the wind, the curve of a girl's cheek, and the chatter of the market place. He understands the thoughts of a child, sees through the vanity of a king and the terrible dignity of a fool. Go away from him, ye Learned Men, talk Greek among yourselves, and hide your ignorance in your grammars, this man knows no Greek, knows more than ye'll ever know; sees more than ye'll ever see, although his hands may be horny from the plough, and he louts humbly before your broadcloth.

Above all, our poet must not be a carpet poet, a drawingroom canary, a ballad on tap. He must not sing at the touching of a button, but with pain and the sweat of his brow, the way all good work is done. The Muse must be wooed with the passion of a lover. A cold heart never made a poem, nor a hot head either. Let our poet sing loudly. An eagle doesn't warble like a dicky bird. If you are a Citizen of the Sun, don't look as if you lived in Tallow Candle Land. When you sing a love song, let the girl hear you. Sing of God and Man and sing greatly. The World, the Flesh, and the Devil are to your hands, and the Lust of the Flesh, the Delight of the Eye, and the Pride of Life are part of your human nature, clamant for expression. Sing the woe of the hunted rabbit when his legs begin to

fail, and he hears the toothed devil close behind; and sing, too, the joy of the dog when he leaps and feels the red, warm tide flush his throat. Battle, murder, and sudden death. Hope, effort, and escape. See it and understand it, and tell us of it. We will listen like children to you if you are big enough to be listened to.

Poetry is not pretty, it is beautiful – a vastly different thing. Don't sing too much for the women – that either coarsens one or makes one delicate, detestably, foolishly delicate, dubious, timorous, or a coxcomb. Prolonged intercourse with women destroys the fibre of a man – one woman always excepted. She, the Golden She – Isolde or Helen, Godiva or the Magdalen, will lift you to the slopes of Parnassus, thence you must climb by your own manhood. Man must be inspired by woman, else his inspiration is fruitless, – Sex tells. Our poet must work for himself, he is his own critic and his only critic, himself is his touchstone. He need not waste energy trying to love mankind, that cannot be done, though his heart be as large as his Epic. Let him love his wife, his friend, his dog, and himself, himself last, but reasonably well; and when he sings let him say boldly what he thinks, and let him first be sure that he does think.

Sinn Féin

22 June 1907

Mrs Maurice M'Quillan

Maurice M'Quillan was an engineer, one of those big, slow, careful men who seem to have been born with a wad of waste in one hand, an oil can in the other, and a screw in his mouth; and one day, without apparently being able to offer any reasonable explanation of the event, he found that he was a married man.

Maurice M'Quillan's wife, Agnes Wilhelmina Farrell, was a Gael by blood, a fighter by instinct and a lady on principle. She had been reared among Clann London, and was the possessor of an outfit of gentility unique in its own way. She also owned an accent that dumbfounded her husband. She carefully elided the letter 'R'

from her vocabulary, and by dint of diligent practice had attained to an unintelligibility of speech and a stoniness of aspect that was eminently genteel and uncomfortable.

She descended on Dublin to visit some relations (for there's a Farrell in every county between here and Gehenna) who happened to be acquainted with Maurice and, by the application of those feminine tactics which a masculine pen does not dare to catalogue, she became entitled to the weighty prefix of Mrs, undertook the guidance of Maurice's morals, directed the application of his salary and became as much a part of his natural economy as his skeleton. So, behold Maurice pulling off his boots and glancing with grave amusement, that custom cannot stale, at a lady hauling off her boots in the same apartment as himself and tying knots into her hair with lumps of waste paper. Maurice, turning the extraordinary fact over, and savouring it in every way, gave vent to a long low chuckle in which amazement, amusement, and incredulity were inextricably blended – and – 'don't make that horrid noise, Maurice, dear,' said his wife, whereupon Maurice scratched his head and scowled surreptitiously at his boots.

Mrs Maurice preferred her second name, Wilhelmina, to her first and more beautiful name, Agnes, and had authorized her husband to use it. He, on the plea that life was short and the name was long, wanted to call her Will, but she insisted that every joint of the name should be utilized, and only gave in because of his aggravating method of pronouncing the word. He would first say 'Will,' then pause, and when she cocked her ears for the rest, residue, and remainder of the procession, he would continue with some emphasis 'hell' (an uncanny word, as everyone must admit), then after another little pause he would growl 'mine' in the perplexed and dubious tone of one who has what he doesn't want and can't lose it; and conclude groaning 'a – a – a' as if he had a pain that required the instant application of a poultice. Then she agreed to shorten the name to Will, which she discarded because he altered it to 'Bill,' a lewd and common appellation. Agnes she thought was a safe name and highly respectable. He promptly shortened it to Ag, and the lady's ear was perplexed in trying to distinguish when he called her Ag and when he called her Hag, and she was unable to discover whether these verbal eccentricities were accidental or the result of misdirected and malignant cogitation. This made her uneasy, and an uneasy woman is as unchancey as a cat with a toothache. Don't stroke her, get out.

Gentility was her aim in life, and like most women her aim was uncertain, but disastrous. A woman will aim her gun at the devil, and only succeed in blowing the head off a saint.

Misdirected energy is worse than laziness, and Mrs M'Quillan had a most well-intentioned mind which was counteracted by a squint in her habits of thought. This, while it made for activity, didn't make for peace, the only goal worth making for. Anything that poor people said or thought or did was vulgar, anything that rich people said or thought, or did, was genteel. Now, if she had reversed her judgment she might have been flattened up against a fact that is fairly obvious, viz. – that poor people are seldom vulgar because they always have the opportunity. Vulgarity is almost entirely a weakness of the rich. Poor people have no time to be anything else but hungry. To romp into chapel with a bustle and a clank, and to blow one's nose like a steam syren or the trump of doom, that is the acme and pinnacle of gentility – to pray, however, isn't. One might indeed submit a petition to the Deity as from one person of quality to another, but bend the knee and adore without asking for anything but the privilege of doing so – tut.

A person with a good appetite was a vulgar person. A hungry person, Mrs M'Quillan thought, was a glutton; another mistake of hers, a glutton in fact being a person who eats when he is full and then takes pills so that he can eat more. A person with a bad appetite was 'interesting,' why, the Lord and Mrs M'Quillan only knew. Here Maurice came under the ban, for he was a big man, and had a terrible sack to fill. When his wife would have finished eating a quarter of an hour Maurice would still have twenty minutes hard chewing to do, and worse, he wouldn't get up until his hunger was appeased. She'd sit with vacant eyes and a wrung face glaring over his head while he munched solemnly, now and again heaving up an apolegetic eye; for she had catalogued all his sense, and read him the index daily. She never let her opinions rust for want of exercise, and aired her grievances as conscientiously as she did her linen. 'The man that doesn't eat can't work,' said Maurice. 'Do you want to get me sacked first, and push me into a hungry grave in the heel of the hunt; pass the spuds.'

Again, when Maurice got thirsty, he refused to sit like a gentleman with his legs under his own mahogany, sipping sour claret out of a thimble; nothing would do him but up and out, and the nearest publichouse with the freshest pint of porter was his objective, not that he was a drunkard, on the contrary he was an

extremely temperate man who wanted lots of water for a very deep well.

One day Mrs M'Quillan's brother came from London on vacation and, of course, his sister put him up during his stay.

Percy Farrell was the masculine complement of Agnes; he was dapper and precise, had several hairs on his upper lip and the largest possible appreciation of himself. If he had little hair, however, he had lots of cheek. Like his sister, residence in London had endowed him with an accent that you'd climb a tree to get away from. He spoke so fast that the front of each word went battering into the rear of the next, so that you were presented with a telescoped sentence, with the meaning squashed somewhere under the text like the passengers in a railway collision. 'Fellow isn't fit to wag a tail,' thought Maurice, 'or I'd call him a pup.'

His coming soothed Agnes immensely; they used to sit for hours canvassing the brutality of life and the lack of culture in the lower classes, with the general application to the men and women of Ireland. They pursued their country and their kindred with the thorough-paced ferocity that is only to be found among the leather-headed and boweless clan called shoneens. Whatever was English was good, holy, and stylish; whatever was Irish was so bad that the word rotten was utterly unable to cope with its vileness. Now, Maurice was not a militant Gael by any means, he was an Irishman and never gave any further thought to the matter. Politics he fought shy of. 'All tongue and no throttle,' said he, 'bags of gas and no light,' and, so far as might have been supposed, his nationality might have been the chance of a geographical distribution in which he had not particular interest, but as he sat, night after night listening to the talk of his wife and his brother-in-law there began to awaken in him nationhood. Patriotism lifted a baby's head in his heart and thrilled him. Old instincts and feelings began to stir, to creep and move within him, and as he sat a terrible anger smouldered in his heart. The sight of these two Irish people snarling at their motherland and hymning the praises of her conqueror and oppressor smote him like a blow in the face. Sometimes his wife appealed to him for confirmation of some complaint she had made against her country, and as this recurred it became increasingly difficult for him to hold in his anger. 'She is a woman,' said he to himself, 'and badly brought up, small blame to her, but this -,' and he looked at his brother-in-law with a hot eye.

'You know,' said Percy, taking a grip on the third hair that

marked the extreme centre of his moustache, ‘you know, you Irish won’t work and you will drink.’

‘That’s just it,’ said Agnes, and turned a frosty eye on her husband.

‘You simply won’t work,’ continued Percy.

‘Why should we,’ queried Maurice, with wonderful calmness, ‘when God drops money out of Paradise for us to buy drink with. Don’t you think we have to work to get the money to buy the drink, or perhaps someone told you that the publicans here give it to us for love.’

‘I mean,’ said Percy, ‘that you only work enough to enable you to buy drink and then you go out on strike.’

‘You mean,’ snarled Maurice, ‘you haven’t got brains enough to mean anything. What do you mean by talking about “You Irish” in my house? Perhaps it’s me you mean; you, Irish, indeed; perhaps, Percy Farrell, it’s an Englishman you are yourself. Where did you get your name from at all. Indeed, Ireland may well have the finger of scorn pointed at her, she may well be a bye-word and a mockery to any decent nation when she gives birth to petty, bloodless, clattering, pot heads like yourself. Is it coming over from London on a holiday you are to swap the back slang of some Cockney wiseacre in the house of an Irishman.’

‘Don’t speak to my brother like that,’ began Agnes.

Maurice flashed her a face she had never seen before, and she sat down quaking. He went towering over to where Percy sat white and shivering.

‘Get your traps together at once,’ said he, ‘and yank them and yourself out of this house as quick as God’ll let you, and don’t let me see your ugly head here again until Providence gives you a scrap of heart and pride and an ounce or two of brains: and you, mam, get to your bed.’

That was why Maurice M’Quillan became a member of the Gaelic League. I’m told, too, that his wife, Agnes Wilhelmina O’Farrell (with the O you’ll note) has a framed certificate for proficiency in Dr MacHenry’s second book hung over her bed, and the baby can say ‘beannacht leat’ fine.

Sinn Féin

17 August 1907

Tattered Thoughts

When you have said *slan libh* to the boys, or seen a girl home, or come back from the class, or the dance or from a long brisk walk, or done one of the thousand things one does when the blood is brisk, the heart is not always tame enough to permit you to sleep. There is an itch in the tenor, and, perhaps the strong call of the darkness comes upon you and the deep memory of your ancestors' night hunts forbids sleep: it is possible that you may not at once proceed to bed. Perhaps you sit with the light out and your fiddle in your hand, with the mute on, scraping away softly at the old, old tunes, old sad tunes, the melodies of which have in their sweetness something of pain, tunes of a long vanished age, music that was hummed by lips that have been clay – how many centuries? As you play, could you but conjure up the environment in which it was possible to make those tunes, see the time when they were fashioned by the artist, you might feel a foreigner, back there in the ages, among the forest folk, or where the armed men gathered to the battle, or in some little, lonely, stone cell the harper may be seen glowing with the first fire of that genius which you are remembering and interpreting. Who was he? What was his standing? Where is he? All you know is that he was a countryman of yours who lived somewhere, sometime; and whose song has come down through the dark with the song of the birds and the laughter of the streams. Not a foreigner, but one of your own, bone of the land and whose destiny is mixed with your own in the strangest, inexplicable way.

Or, maybe, you do not play any instrument, perhaps you just light your pipe and sit by the window looking out at the moon (he saw it too), and think all the thoughts that have been handed down through the ages just as surely as the melodies of the bards or the legends of the seannachies; and, as you sit, your hand will itch for something, the artist awake in you, will be searching for the tool of his craft – a pen – a pen. Let us capture our thoughts and fetter them, so as we may understand the waywardness of our own souls and through them the souls of others.

Life, life, life, death, death, death. What caused the musician long ago, that dead musician! to thrill his harp with those strange sad thoughts. Why did the poet tell his secret, trimming it with all the soft embroideries of rhyme, to the listening people. Why did the people treasure them, learn them by heart and repeat, and again repeat them, and lo, the harper and the poet and the people are dead, forgotten, decayed, and gone; and yet the music and the songs, and the stories, that they made are living now, and can never die. What was it all for? What was the use of it? They, the creators, are dead, yet their thoughts move amongst us, of a different age, like the phantoms of themselves, holding us with a recollection and a promise. So the coral insect lives for its task and when the island is builded where is the insect? Do we, too, live only for our task, and what will be seen when our time is past? What will we have builded?

It is hard to trace the beginning of even the most ordinary effort. You do something trivial to-day, and the consequences of your thoughtless act may go ramifying into eternity changing the history of not only nations and countries, but bringing peoples and continents under the sway of your ten thousand years' old foolishness; so MacMurragh sinned long ago, and Erin is still paying for his libertinage, so Ossian was great long ago and Erin is still proud of his greatness.

So far as our limited acquaintance with time goes, there is no beginning or end. Everything was as it is when we came, and will be as it was when we go. One hundred and fifty years from this date, everything that now draws the breath of life will have long since ceased to draw the breath of life, and yet, the world will be as busy, as populous, and as political as ever, and the mountains will note no change. Yesterday Finn was, to-day I am, to-morrow who will be?

The world is always young, because the eyes that look on it are always new, nothing is old save books, trees, and mountains; they constitute that by-product of thought – history.

Many things that are sundered by apparently interstellar space are yet the extremes of a common principle. And extremes do meet, but not at the ends, that is madness: they meet in the middle, where sanity dwells.

Good and bad are perfectly comprehensive, but holiness and unmitigated devilry are both outside the scope of human comprehension. Man is neither as black nor as white as he is often painted. The good man contains all the potentialities for evil, the criminal might be a good man if he got the chance.

Crime is sometimes the result of an overplus of vitality. Good may often be traced to a bad circulation of the blood. Appetite determines what you shall eat. Strength determines what you shall break, and self-control determines whether you shall be a glutton or an aesthetic, a criminal, or a hero.

If we were as liberally provided with self-control as we are with passions and appetites, the world would be virtuous. Self-control is a thing apart, independent even of brains, it would seem, for the wisest of men are frequently lacking in this quality. It too is a matter of appetite. Many a weakling prides himself on his self-control, when, as a matter of fact, he had no self to control, and could not possibly control it if he had. He plants a more or less iron hand on nothing – and shouts that he has got it; let him not seek to get it valued lest he discover his own bankruptcy.

It is as easy for the son of a beggarman to be a miser as it is for the son of a millionaire to be a spendthrift. The one hoards what he wants badly, the other throws away that which he has no use for, both acting naturally and admirably. When the rich man hoards his super-surplus it is then he is suffering from lack of self-control, and a lavish beggar is a lunatic.

To be rich is nothing. To be rich and healthy are gifts the gods seldom bracket together. The brake is always being applied. The power to spend is sternly limited by the capacity for enjoyment. The capacity for enjoyment is kept healthy by being generally allied to a minute spending power. The poor have lots of appetite and no food, the rich lots of food and no appetite. The one would eat if he got the chance. The other has the chance and can't take it, and in the end they both die of hunger.

The strength of one passion sets the pace for the others. You cannot eat well unless you are hungry. You cannot love well unless you hate well. You cannot pray at all unless you are a sinner. Virtue that has not a thorough comprehension of vice is not virtue. It is negation or impotence. Ignorance is always futile. Law only exists through the existence of lawlessness, for when the latter is gone there ceases to be any necessity for the former. Good flourishes with peculiar brilliance when it is surrounded by evil, and evil is particularly abhorrent when it is in the neighbourhood of good. Each throws the other into a prominence that is not quite just.

Neither love nor hate, virtue or crime can be extreme among a highly civilised community. As we civilise our vices, we barbarize our virtues: the balance must be maintained. You cannot do away

with hate without jeopardising the existence of love. If you lessen crime you also curtail virtue. You can have no pleasure, you cannot even enjoy comfort unless you are familiar with pain. What is the good of rest when you have not worked. Food is a nuisance unless you are hungry. Every extreme criticises its pole. If everyone was virtuous vice would be a distinction.

Man is antagonistic to the crowd. It does not represent him, it submerges his ego: he craves a personality, he searches with a candle for his soul. He won't wear that coloured tie because so-and-so wears it; he won't frequent this place of entertainment because it is common. Some become prigs through this craving, some become exclusive, intolerant, aristocratic; some become taciturn and lonely, shy, misanthropic, hermetical.

Man strives to be a real self in himself. He craves a personality. He searches with a candle for his soul. He aims at difference because he must. Nature works through the variability of species, and the tendency to vary is very strong although kept in check by the gregarious habits of our kind and the permanence of the marriage tie, but the latter unlike the former is not altogether stable, and never will be.

Every blessing wags a curse for its tail. Civilisation in return for its ease kills you with its dullness; you have to take the bark with the dog. Life for many is work, worry and woe only diversified by meal times. While death, which for them spells rest, has also the alternative of fire and damnation. Man was made to mourn, and providence sees that he does it. Nature growls, the devil prowls, fortune scowls, and man howls – and well he may. Everything seems to be on his back, including himself. To live is neither his pleasure nor his right; it is his duty, and he has to do it, although he does not know how. Tooth and claw is the law, and he obeys it, though with loathing, for man is a good sort, sound at heart. A woman never sees a child but she wants to kiss it; a man never sees a dog but he wants to feed it. Things are against him, and he sees it. He doesn't know anything, and won't admit his ignorance, but desperately, insistently, he is seeking for knowledge. What pushed me here? What is pushing me hence? Where am I being pushed to? What necessity has sown space with planets? Who oils the axis of the earth? Am I something more or less than I look? Who or what is dependent on me? So he asks and searches. He dredges the profundity of the seas. He has looked into the eyes of an ant. His hand has stretched through space out and beyond the void and felt the stuff of the stars.

He has watched the spider at his loom and peered into the cold, empty caverns of the moon. What? What? What? he asks; and searches beneath, above and around. He has rummaged in heaven and hell and Connacht, and found theology, brimstone, peat – all combustible, and nothing else; nothing that he can give a name to or fix a reason for, but still he searches, insistent, curious, baffled. Is it reason or chance, he asks. What is the answer to the riddle? and God knows is the only answer he can get. If he did not believe in God he'd commit suicide.

But now 'tis late, the sun has hours ago
Gone hunting down the world in the west;
And walking o'er the hills, the broad-faced moon,
A little glittering star in either hand
Is come to light the rabbit to its bed
And bids the pompous owl wake up and hunt,
Wondering why the world's fast asleep.
We, too, must seek the rest that paints the cheek,
And pours its sparkling liquid in the eyes,
And tells us finer stories than the bards,
Ossian or Osgar, with their thoughtful art
Can weave

Sinn Féin
5 October 1907

Prose Writings: 1908—11

In 1908 Stephens was 'discovered' by George W. Russell (A.E.) while working as a stenographer at T. T. Mcreedy & Son, solicitors. While A.E. was in search of Stephens the poet, Stephens – who was fairly content with his poetry at that time – was struggling with his prose. He wrote to Edward J. M. C. Plunkett, eighteenth Baron Dunsany, saying that he admired Dunsany's fertile imagination and that he had tried to create fantasies in a similar vein to that writer. Praising Lord Dunsany's spontaneity, movement, and 'enormous' zest, Stephens told his acquaintance:

For my part I am hammering out with great labour a prose style. I was enamoured of the purplest patches & used to wave my arms & lips at once, also I used to make jokes that one could both hear & see from a great distance. I am only beginning to get out of these crudities & I really believe I have got a grip on something that is very like a style.

(*Letters*, p. 17)

The sketches and humorous dialogues of the Old Philosopher written during this period are revelatory of Stephens' efforts. The Old Philosopher is an eccentric character noted for his volatility and loquacity. Stephens confessed much later that the model for the character's non-stop talking was A.E.; but the Old Philosopher was also an excellent mask for a talkative young writer who claimed he turned to prose because the creation of poetry did not drain his 'torrents' of energy. The dialogues of this quaint figure – the discourses on the viceregal microbe, government, and lawyers – are the only ones in a group of seventeen pieces starring the Old Philosopher which did not find their way into print again in *The Crock of Gold* or *Here Are Ladies*. The political content of these sketches may have disqualified them for future use, for in every other way they are similar to their companion pieces in approach, diction, and comic stance.

Between 1907 and 1911, over eighty essays, short stories, poems, and other writings by Stephens appeared in *Sinn Féin*. Throughout many of these contributions, patriotic themes have been struck: the role of the Irish writer as a reflector and explicator of cultural

heritage, values, and dreams; the active part to be played by the Irish people in the national cause; and the villainous aspects of the English police, Members of Parliament, judges, and other governmental officials. Other pieces are more philosophical in nature. 'Poetry,' 'Tattered Thoughts,' 'Success,' 'Imagination,' 'Good and Evil,' 'On Politeness,' and 'Facts' may be viewed as a set in which Stephens attempts definitions, creates aphorisms, and works at the development of a theory of aesthetics. He urges writers to find their subject matter in the contrasts of life: hunger and thirst, love and hate, ocean and sky, victory and defeat – subject matter which he would use over and over again in his writings. For those who are not artists, he urges humanity over conventional civility, personal satisfaction over success, and honest emotions over polite facades – personal values which he upheld.

Stephens' attempts at writing new forms of prose are represented here by two political speeches and a short piece on contemporary art. Under Griffith's influence, he had been attending Gaelic League classes and Sinn Féin political meetings and cultural events. Even before he met Griffith, however, he was an ardent nationalist. As early as 1905 he was making notes for lectures: on Cromwell, Charles II, James II, and the Battle of the Boyne; on Douglas Hyde, 'the greatest man in Ireland today'; and on the development of a nation through a return to the national language and customs.

'The Insurrection of '98' is a fiery speech defending Irish lawlessness on grounds of English lawlessness. 'Acts of Parliament when not Acts of the nation are Acts of War.' Written two years later, 'Irish Idiosyncrasies' generated a brief flurry in the newspapers, but not over its political stance. Rather, his seeming approbation of the concept of evil produced a reply by a critic, 'Eilis,' and that in turn occasioned his article 'Good and Evil.' Stephens' views on the subject of evil clearly point to the influence of William Blake's 'Contraries,' although he does not acknowledge this source in his speech. In 'An Essay in Cubes,' however, he admits that he finds Blake 'very good to steal from; and let it be conceded that theft is the first duty of man.' Both speeches demonstrate Stephens' growing narrative skills as they are used to turn history into colourful story-telling.

The commentary on the art exhibition is not without its political message; simply put, it is that the Irish should appreciate their own artists – a sentiment which is in keeping with Stephens' pronouncements on the need for an identifiably Irish culture, and not a surprising suggestion from a young artist seeking his own audience.

The Insurrection of '98*

One of the most remarkable examples of existing under difficulties is that presented by the Irish Nation. Warfare would seem to be the dominant note in Nature. . . . Nature has a short way with her vanquished. She suppresses them utterly, and the tale of their defeat is noted only in buried rocks and mud deposits; but for these signs, we would never know they had been, for no living trace of them or their battles has been perpetuated. They were defeated, and on their defeat Nature banished and obliterated them utterly in obedience to her universal law 'win or die.'

The spectacle, therefore, of anything existing in spite of defeat may well excite the critical acumen of the observer, and Ireland presents this unique spectacle. She may be said to exist in a state of chronic defeat. She lives in despite of, in the very teeth of defeat. Every effort she made in search of national organisation is stamped out ruthlessly, but she points to her captured standards, her submerged civilisation, her ancient learning and piety, her failures and futilities, and says 'I can renew them – I will renew them all. I cannot be stamped out. I can be neither beaten nor discouraged.' Her national egotism is enormous. Her vitality boundless. Yesterday it was the United Irishmen [who] marched to certain defeat, and were not afraid. To-day Sinn Féin lifts a truculent head and the old lion may grow afresh. Ireland will howl derision, will scorn her victories and accept her own defeat with the liveliest hopes of one day and forever reversing that judgment. . . .

Ireland has never accepted the inevitable as being the ultimate. She has always, with an optimism that is almost marvellous, believed in her star. Behind all the woes of time, she discerns a destiny, and until she loses that faith or that egotism she cannot be utterly beaten.

Every weapon that the sagest statecraft could suggest has in turn been used against her life. She has been discouraged to the verge of

* Extracts from a lecture delivered to the Dublin Liberal Unionist Association.

extinction. She has been deported to vanishing point. She has been starved to a skeleton. She has been battle-harassed till she was prone with the earth. She has been planted with aliens until her real self was scarcely visible for the swarm of strangers. She has been laughed out of existence. Always the Celt has been going with a vengeance; always the Celt has been returning with a vengeance. Some time, she believes, her dogged persistency will be rewarded, and she will sit in the halls of her conqueror. When that day comes, if it ever does, she will certainly treat her enemy better than her enemy has treated her. . . .

Seekers after truth, with brows of meditation, are continually asking: Why should Ireland wish to be separated from England when English laws and attainments are the objects of almost universal esteem?

English laws and successes are native to England, were born with her inception as a nation, grew lusty with her growth, were modified and amended in accordance with the trend of her culture, and are the flower of her national mind.

But these matters that are so admirable at home in England are hopelessly abroad in Ireland. They are alien and not of the soil, they are inimical to the native culture of this country, and, while they are undoubted virtues in England, they are vices of a most malignant character in Ireland.

If all the laws that England makes for Ireland were boons and blessings, and if every political action of hers was a concentrated beatitude, they would still be bad for Ireland, because they would not be the outcome of her own toil, they would not represent any native or thoroughly understood currency. Wealth that has not been worked for is a doubtful blessing, leading to cessation of activity, which means death. Laws that have not made themselves are oppressions. Acts of Parliament when not Acts of the nation are Acts of War.

The belief of all nations is that whatever is foreign is unhealthy, and this belief is in its essence true, and notwithstanding the dreams of universal brotherhood, it is for the survival of nations a belief to be sedulously advocated. The culture of Nations, as of men, depends largely on environment. They, too, are moulded by their atmosphere, and no other nation can disperse that atmosphere or create an artificial environment that will be truly workable.

Among the many efforts that Ireland made for freedom, perhaps the greatest was the Insurrection of 1798, and notwithstanding the

futility of that effort, its complete and absolute failure, and the comic opera style in which antagonistic historians have painted it, it was great in the heroic sense of the word. A baby coming to grips with a giant would scarcely present a more remarkable sight than the spectacle of Ireland at any time engaging in physical strife with England, more particularly the fighting in 1798, and those to whom the under dog is always an object of compassionate admiration have no occasion in this event to withhold either their compassion or their admiration.

At and for some little time after the disbandment of the Volunteers, Ireland began to attain some degree of material prosperity. For a short time, political and religious factions were, if not dead, at least sleeping, and when the energy that is expended on these rancorous subjects is utilised in forwarding the arts and crafts of civilisation then progress is bound to march to prosperity.

Protestants had begun to imagine that Catholics might also be vertebrate animals, Catholics were beginning to surmise that a patriotic Protestant was absolutely a possibility, when suddenly the deluge.

Any country that is united is impregnable. The land that has a national consciousness to direct its expansion must expand. A united Ireland, in spite of platitude, would be too healthy to submit to any yoke, clerical or political. All these you may call truisms, but a word that has apparently mislaid its meaning should not be used to overturn a fact. It must be remembered that a truism is about the only ism that is true: but a country that lost its essential freedom must submit to many and different bondages. In addition to external oppression it will also be the victim of such native charlatans and pedagogues as may vend either political or spiritual consolation. Ireland is no exception to this rule, and is suffering still from this complaint.

While Irish prosperity would wear the most charming appearance to Irish eyes it might present a more repellent visage to a mercantile and populous neighbour. We have little data to show that England has ever been particularly solicitous for the commercial prosperity of Ireland, or that anywhere alien success in trade will ever bring rapture to the bosom of any neighbouring trader. The economic laws under which we all groan in concert prevents such optimism. We can only be generous at the risk of our lives. Kindness that cuts its own throat is a sentimental growth that flowers in lunacy. Therefore, England crushed Irish trade, she had

to maybe, but in the doing of it she acted in a manner that not even economic or racial antagonism can justify.

There is a rigour beyond even the rigour of war – England used it. When pushed too far justice lapses into barbarism. England pushed her justice, as she deemed it, sheer through barbarism, and into what brutal and horrid domain let the records tell.

Justice is the foundation of all human intercourse. It is the only right man can claim from man. We dare not ask for mercy, the laws of life forbid its being granted, but we can demand justice as our least claim; for it is the base of all order. We crave mercy from God, we demand bare justice from our fellow-creatures. England has never been and is not now just to Ireland. That is the root of all dissatisfaction and antipathy.

Patriotism has from the earliest dawn of history been regarded as the first of the virtues but, to an Englishman, the fact that an Irishman loves his country and his home seems such a desperate inversion of nature that the only way to deal with the malefactor is to kill him, and that with such circumstances of pain, terror, and degradation as will most effectively discourage others from a similar crime. . . .

The passage of the Act of Union was at this time exercising the statescraft of English politicians. To force such an Act on a united country was an impossibility, the first thing, therefore, to be done, was to see that the united country should become a disunited country. This was affected by the use of an ancient but dishonourable flag. The standard of religious and sectarian bigotry was unfurled and the irresponsible panic that that unrighteous emblem constantly engenders at once became lively. . . .

The thirst of an Irish Catholic is unnatural and prodigious, and can only be quenched by repeated and deep draughts of Protestant blood. So the old lie spread its venom and soon the united country seethed with fear, hate, and fury. Protestant patriotism was gripped in those terrible waters, swung for a while in the vortex and thence to some haunt from which it has since made the most cursory pilgrimages. . . .

The methods by which statescraft attains its ends are seldom clean, can indeed from their nature not be clean. There are so many divergent interests to be guarded, so many differences to be reconciled, so many obstructions that can only be overridden by cajolery, fraud, or aggression, but there ought to be some limit to

state villainy, some ethical frontier at which even governmental marauders might pause, but there is not. . . .

The methods by which the Union was forced on a reluctant and helpless country were alike discreditable to England, Christianity, and civilisation. Bribery and corruption were not the most obvious factors – they of their kind must be secret to be effective. The licensed manufacturer of outrage was also busy; he would seem to be a permanent factor in Anglo-Irish politics. A pretext, however, was necessary for the abolition of the Irish Parliament, which, I may say, was only too ready to be abolished: its acquiescence having been bought and paid for.

This pretext was the habitual, ingrained, and incorrigible lawlessness of the Irish people. The Irish people objected to being annexed – they were lawless. They had a singular desire to retain the characteristics and dignity of an independent nation – they were lawless. They, by some unexplainable obliquity of thought, objected to being plundered – they were lawless. When a nation is being kidnapped in the aggregate, plundered in the piecemeal, and warned by the thieves that the law must be obeyed or it will be enforced, that nation may, perhaps, be excused if the hue and tint of its acts depart somewhat from the normal. The most lawless institution at this time in Ireland was the law. That vast and powerful engine put off for a time the robes of justice and showed to her astounded litigants the apparel and mien of a bandit. Habeas Corpus was suspended by the Government. Ordinary human intercourse was suspended by the spies. A proportion of the population of Ireland was suspended by the neck.

The Government goaded the insurrection into being. The insurrection was necessary for their plans, but they did not want an insurrection that would be dangerous.

The United Irishmen were becoming strong. For their suppression the Act of Convention was passed. This, however, had the effect of changing an open Society into a secret one, but although it was secret in appearance it was not so in reality. The whole Society was riddled with spies, honeycombed with informers. Whatever the Society planned the Government knew of and consequently could checkmate.

As a further protection the Gunpowder Act was passed. This made the possession of war munition criminal and rendered whatever rising might ensue abortive.

But the time was ripe. In 1797 the country was placed under martial law. At the first glance this might seem to be a step taken to prevent a rising, but it was only seeming. At the time Lord Carhampton was Commander of the Forces in Ireland—some 130 000 men. The vigorous steps which he took seemed to be breaking the back of any possible insurrection. Consequently he was so hampered and thwarted in his work by the Government that he resigned his commission. The insurrection was necessary to give the full pretext for annexation. General Abercrombie was next appointed Commander-in-Chief. At the end of two months he also threw up his commission in disgust. Then General Lake came on the scene, and with him as Chief Secretary, Lord Castlereagh.

With their advent martial and magisterial rigour became so insupportable that at last the event happened. Rebellion was abroad, the people badgered, tyrannised and goaded rose with whatever weapons they could find, and looked for some head to hit.

So far as England was concerned there was very little danger. She had more than a sufficiency of men in Ireland at the time to cope with any such undisciplined tumult. The fire and vigour of the war was just far enough from her immediate neighbourhood to be harmless and near enough to be exciting. All the insurgent leaders of any eminence were either dead or in duress. Lord Edward Fitzgerald had expired in jail; Oliver Bond was dead of an apoplexy; the Brothers Shears, Father Coigley, and Wm. Michael Byrne had been hung. The arms of the insurgents were scanty and ill-found. Their men undisciplined and untried. Their plans no sooner formulated than they became the property of the Government.

When one reviews the facts incident to the revolution, one is struck most by the wonderful success of the insurgents; and this success is difficult to account for, certainly not to be accounted for by military exegesis. There was no one who could properly be called a leader. Bagenal Harvey was a country gentleman whose skill in the use of weapons of precision was probably limited to the daily discipline of his razor. The other most notable figures in the picture are parish priests, and although the Church militant may wage disastrous war against the powers of evil their qualities are seldom such as would render them formidable to purely material arms.

No purely popular rising can ever hope for success against a disciplined army. It does not matter how large the popular rising may be, or how brave the units comprising it are, the lack of

discipline and a master head cannot be compensated for by any other warlike virtues, unless, indeed, the commander of the army opposing is of an abject ineptitude and his soldiery of an incredible cowardice.

Properly speaking success or failure is no criterion of value. All value should be in the effort. Success to the vulgar mind justifies all effort; defeat damns it. The brigand that can hold what he has stolen is made by popular acclaim a magistrate. The brigand that cannot hold his spoils is hung, and there is no changing this point of view.

But I consider it untrue, ignorant, vulgar, and vicious.

The great thing about the rebellion of 1798 is that there was a rebellion. That there were found even in Erin men who could die for a principle. It proved that Ireland was not dead, was not really enslaved, was alive and kicked to proclaim it.

These poor farmers and labourers, these small craftsmen, grocers, and clerks were men in the best sense of the word. They were not afraid. They had grown to the full height of manhood. They are worthy of all historic regard and the acclaim of their descendants. They were of notable and heroic bulk, and they failed because they antagonised the strongest thing in nature – superior force.

The excesses of the insurgents are even to-day frowned on with brows of reproach and disgust. But in warfare the only thing that cannot be dispensed with is death. And to the average man a private grudge has all the magnitude of a public one, will loom larger in fact because of its intimacy. The state is not only at war. The individual also is concerned. He is no longer a man. He is an authorised and conscienceless killer and all his acts are horrid and unnatural.

Scullabogue is mentioned with hated breath, and well it may be. We hear but little, however, of what occurred at New Ross earlier on the same day. . . .

War is a trade in which men savagely and cruelly kill other men. If we wave flags for the fact let us not screw up our eyes at the details.

Any excesses the insurgents committed were in direct retaliation for excesses their opponents were guilty of – that is war – and the Irish excesses are dwarfed into insignificance when contemplated by the side of the vast monumental and prodigious rapine of the enemy.

When the war was finished the English loss did not total 19 000 men, but Ireland mourned for over 50 000, and these 50 000 were not all killed in battle. They were hunted through the mountains and the glens. They were bayoneted in the home, the field, and the

church. They were flogged and pitchcapped and hung and cut down again. They were quarter-hung and half-hung, and three-quarters-hung and finally hung. And if there is any truth in the Buddhistic doctrine of reincarnation these men were eminently fitted to be giraffes in the next world through the neck stretching they got in this one.

Ireland made a great fight against tremendous odds, and her opponent was not only England; herself was a combatant against herself. Not only was the richest and most powerful country in the world her antagonist, but the entire bulk of her Protestant children were ranged against her and a large proportion of the Catholics sat on the fence. The Catholic gentry held aloof almost to a man, and presented addresses of mean-spirited and despairing loyalty to any person who would take the trouble to read them, and on some occasions they carried successful arms against their own countrymen. At Monasterevan, for instance, the Catholic loyalists of that town, under Capt. Cassidy repulsed the insurgent attack.

Whether this was the outcome of loyalty to England or only the extremity of fear that causes a cornered rat to bare its teeth I cannot say. This I do say, that their loyalty to England was treachery to Ireland, and any loyalty whose roots are nourished in treachery is not worth the recognition of any decent nation, should indeed be a matter for apprehension and odium, a thing for suspicion to look askance at and be dubious of.

The strangest thing about all Irish risings is that while they were almost entirely Catholic in their scope their inception was Protestant and their commanders were Protestants.

Almost always the leaders of a purely patriotic movement in this country have been members of the Protestant religion, and I believe that when the units as well as the leaders of any Irish movement are Protestant that day will see the freedom of this country a fact, stable, triumphant, and impregnable.

Sinn Féin

21 March 1908

Success

This is the meaning of Success—That in whatever path of life Providence has set your feet walking your fellow-men will recognise your ability to deal with whatever duties fall in your way. This is Success—That you shall rise superior to any duty, however arduous, that may devolve upon you in the exercise of the business for which you are specially qualified.

This, however, is Fame—That your fellow competitors, the men of your own craft, will recognise your supremacy in their business and bow to your knowledge of all its branches and submit to your arbitration.

Success is the recognition of your ability. Fame the acknowledgment of your supremacy; and, judged by this standard, if a carpenter, tailor, or plumber, by the beauty of finish, cut and adjustment is superior to his fellow-craftsmen, he is just as worthy of fame and acknowledgment as is the man who excels in poetry and painting or the military genius whose mathematical ingenuity enables him to slay thousands of his fellow-men and attain a glory which up to this day is regarded as the acme and pinnacle of human eminence. The pebble on the gravel path contains proportionately all the virtues of hardness and staunchness so apparent in its massive brother of the cliffs that frowns grimly on the fury of the ocean.

But Success, as at present understood, is an exceedingly debased virtue. Success to-day is synonymous with 'possession.' Have you got flocks and herds, a certain amount of minted metal and an inflated abdomen? if not you are proved a failure by your lack, and the people, who, some humorous philosopher alleged, speak with the voice of God, acclaim this Success and so guarantee its existence and right to exist. The worship of the golden calf was not peculiar to Mosaic times, but while Moses ground it to powder and dispersed it we would melt it and worship it still.

I meet a man in a shiny hat, with a gold watch chain swaggering across the bulge of his waistcoat; and, apparently, the shiny hat, the gold chain, and the suggestion of immense adipose tissue beneath it

demoralises my manhood, and if he condescends to address some bad grammar to me I am, perhaps, sufficiently loutish to take off my hat and abase myself before the triple shrine of hat, chain, and stomach. Why do I do this? It is because I perceive that he is in possession of some things which I lack, but if I was a logical man, which the gods have forbidden, I would balance the account with the knowledge that I have some things he has not got and never will have. Thus the positions are even. I have no shiny hat, but my head is thatched most plentifully. He has a rotund and massive stomach, but its extent is interfering with his breathing, its weight causes his legs to wobble and the necessity of administering to its needs has probably endowed him with fatty degeneration of the heart and the treble chin, that is the continuation of it, will some day choke him in an apoplexy; but my waistband is small, and when I buy a loaf I haven't to also purchase a set of teeth to aid me to eat it, and a pill to digest it. He has £50 000 in bank, I have a big biceps, a neat triceps, a hard deltoid, and a magnificent trapezius, all banked in my body, and the peccant treasurer or secretary that elopes with my capital will have to learn surgery first.

Almost all men of average mental capacity have in them the makings of successful men, fools have a world to themselves, and are probably the only happy creatures in existence. Are you a carpenter? then your aim in life must be to prove yourself a good carpenter, to know intimately everything that can be known on the subject of carpentry, to be able to do anything in the way of woodwork as well as any other carpenter can do or has done, to be ready at all seasons to apply yourself to your craft with the joy a good man should find in the work of his hands or his head – that is Success, and cannot fail to be recognised as such, and then, of course, such material goods as are the proper reward of your labour will come to you in no uncertain stream. But, if by your energy and industry you succeed in amassing flocks and herds and fat pasture land and yellow corn fields, then you must not expect people to admire you and laud you on account of these. All their honour must be paid to your ability as a carpenter, or man who has done something and done it well, not to a man who has done something and maybe owns it badly. Otherwise your craftsmanship is a mockery and slavery and your whole life and work is failure.

Should you leave your trade a little better than it was when you entered it, should you improve on the methods of work and make the labour easier for those who come after, then you cease to be a

workman and become an inventor, a creator, an artist, and are rightly entitled to such fame as the quality of your work can demand.

Your Success must be measured, not by the amount of money you have made, but by the number of chairs and tables you have made and the goodness or badness of their structure. Your Success must be gauged, not by what you give, not by what you own but by what you distribute. By possession you prove nothing, by work you vindicate your right to existence. Possession renders you lazy, arrogant, and out of accord with nature. Work places you in intimate and vital contact with her, the greatest of workers, and she recognises you as a son of hers and a good boy too. But all the same I wish, oh I sadly wish, I had flocks and herds and gold and silver and menservants and maidservants, and horses on which to ride and asses to applaud me.

But, you say, 'I am not a carpenter or a tailor, I do not make anything, I only keep account of the things that are made, I am a clerk or a tallyman, and can take no pride in the putting down and totting up of figures, and the registering of things done.' Yet, a chara, you can be Successful.

Success is not conferred, it is begotten. It is not received, it is produced. It comes from yourself, not from others. Success has its habitation in the head, not in the pocket. Learn to be content, that is the great secret. Learn not to be covetous. Have a mind above metals and minerals. Strive to find the true value of things and then you will be scornful of the trifles.

Learn to be as little dependent on outside influences as is possible. In any community of men the interest of all is inextricably woven with the interest of each – therefore, absolute freedom is impossible, but you can reduce your dependence to the minimum and find in yourself every essential for dignified living. Justify yourself to yourself and, behold your Success is already apparent.

There you have Success – a calm and steadfast soul that acquiesces in and bows to the laws of life and death, and is dignified in both.

Your honour is your own and none can harm it. Your own private opinion of yourself is of more value in the scheme of things than your neighbour's opinion of you. Hold fast to your honour.

Your reputation is not your own, but your neighbours'; don't be too particular about it. It is outside of your personal influence, is conferred by strangers, and can be blasted with a lie or the

misunderstanding of the ignorant. Yourself makes your honour, others make your reputation. What you make measures your success. Cherish your honour.

All Success and happiness appears, at first sight, to depend on the cultivation of selfishness, but when you remember that Success consists in what you are able to give, then the charge of selfishness falls to the ground.

In pursuing happiness don't confound it with pleasure, the difference is great in bulk and grain.

You cannot attain to happiness, but in the pursuit of it you may fall in with wisdom and learn that it is really good to be kind and easy to boot and, finally, that perhaps the greatest happiness is to be unhappy.

You may also learn how to be free and how to make your country free.

Meditate on the words 'Sinn Fein.' You can translate them in the English to this word, 'Success.'

Sinn Féin

28 March 1908

The Old Philosopher Discourses on the Viceregal Microbe

The Ancient had been reading 'Sinn Fein.' I, in some trepidation, waited to hear his opinion of this new journal. For a considerable period his liquor was forgotten, and it was not until the gentleman-in-waiting had twice informed him that another gentleman was waiting for the paper that he condescended to speak. He anathematised the acolyte, and said that the other gentleman might wait till his hair grew round his feet and he died in a tangle; but, becoming presently more composed, he surrendered the paper and addressed me with great dignity.

It is, perhaps, only proper that the North Pole should have been

discovered by an American. This great people have discovered everything, as may be seen from a glance at their advertisements. But from my observation of modern science there is one great discovery which has not been made by the American people – that is the discovery of the great consumption microbe. The entire credit for this tremendous and epoch-making discovery is the inalienable property of the Scottish nation, who, after a vast amount of learning and research, have tracked the consumption microbe to Ireland, where its ultimate lair was discovered under a bed in the Viceregal Lodge.

This extraordinary animal and his family – four male microbes of tender age and a red-legged female of great beauty – were instantly seized, put into a pill box, and conveyed by motor car to Connemara, where, in the presence of a guard of honour of dragoons, they were released. A salute of one hundred and eighty-five and a half guns was then fired, and it was declared by the 'Jeeman's Journal,' 'The Airish Chimes,' 'The Taily Surpress,' and the 'Ginger Pendent' that this was, by Royal proclamation, a great day for Ireland. The inhabitants of Connemara, on pain of being dismissed from the Peasantry, to which they are much attached, were commanded to instantly contract consumption. Some did this on the premises. In this way it is extremely contagious, and others, in one way or another, endeavoured to obey the Imperial rescript, and with such success that at this moment, we are informed by the English and American journals, the whole country is successfully inoculated, and the population of this country (with the exception of the police, who are immune by law, but very dissatisfied, and the residents of Rathmines, who are stylish without the assistance of art) are strongly and incorrigibly consumptive.

Microbes have many and varied uses, which at present are but little understood by the commonality, and as yet only dimly apprehended by the medical profession. It is usually believed that bacilli are solely useful when introduced into the human body, but while their application as a deterrent is in this manner very successful they can also be introduced into the body politic.

It is a very simple matter to inoculate a business. A trade can be made just as consumptive as a trader. A nation is as liable to infection as any scavenger. A place and a policeman can both be consumptive, and in both cases the deterring or discouraging effect is similar.

A man is microbed at this point of contact, and so is a country.

This point is in man, his skin; in a nation the newspapers are the point of contact, and when the point of contact of a person or a parish is successfully inoculated the effect in both cases is similar.

It is interesting to observe how often this country has been microbed by English statecraft, and it is very easy, from historic sources, to observe the progress of the serum injected, how far the disease spread, and the languid manner in which the nation recovered from the operation. From the extent of these operations, and the extremely deterrent nature of the diseases, I am inclined to believe that, barring cats, the Irish people have the strongest constitution of the nations.

The most successful and extensive inoculation to which this country has been subjected is that known as the Plantations, particularly the Plantation of Ulster, when a vast number of aliens were forcibly injected into this country. From this epidemic of foreigners we have not yet recovered. Later, a Famine Microbe was impelled into our veins, and still later we were treated with very virulent Trade Bacilli, the ravages of which we are only gradually, and with difficulty, surmounting.

So long as this country does not object to being doctored or bulldosed just so long will English statesmen continue to supply us with microbes for the purpose. The fact that we are surmounting and recovering from these diseases has made it imperative, in the interests of Trade, to re-inoculate us, and so our newspapers, which are our National, and the English Press Agencies, which are our International points of contact, have been vigorously treated with the consumption microbe. Although this operation has been performed quite recently, the progress of the disease is distinctly traceable. I am informed that our laces, our woollen and linen fabrics, are already quarantined in the markets of the world as infectious and dangerous commodities, and that ourselves are viewed with suspicion and alarm, even when we have acquired an English accent and been otherwise disinfected.

Of the personal appearance of microbes I have very little knowledge, for, in this country, they are (except when imported) extremely rare. I am informed, however, that a microbe usually, but not always, consists of a head and a twist, or, maybe, a couple of twists; that they are fond of living in dirty water, wherein they resemble boys; that they have no regularised system of morality, and that they are hard of hearing. They form part of the equipment of British Ministers, who generally have to pass an examination in the

use of microbes before they are sent to this country. The last microbe which was unladen upon us came originally from Central Africa. Its name as an organism I cannot now remember, but its effect is known as the Sleeping Sickness. Great skill was necessary in treating ourselves and our daily papers with this bacillus, but its administration was, on the whole, very successful from the British point of view; and although we have partially recovered from its effects there is little doubt that we shall again be ordered this treatment. The Sectarian Microbe is another of all-round excellence; it has been tried on many occasions and has never been known to fail. There is yet another microbe with which we were inoculated at the time of the Union or thereabouts. Its collective name is The Parliamentary Party. It is a very hardy microbe; it wears a tall hat, and sometimes spectacles, which makes it appear more respectable than it really is. As a matter of fact it is, in my opinion, the most virulent of all the foreign microbes, but I fancy it has been used too often and now begins to show signs of decay. However, we may get rid of it also.

Here the old gentleman demanded very angrily of the gentleman-in-waiting if that other gentleman had finished yet with 'Sinn Fein.' The other gentleman, who had not finished with the paper, nevertheless laid it down on the counter and endeavoured, unsuccessfully, to look as if he never had it, but my friend looked at him in such a manner that he became abashed, and stole out. The philosopher instantly plunged his eyes into the leading article, from which, during the remainder of the evening, I was unable to detach him.

Sinn Féin Daily
7 September 1909

The Old Philosopher Discourses on Government

The Old Gentleman was explaining that the reason he did not keep a dog was because he objected to paying more taxes than he could avoid. While speaking on the extraordinary scope of taxation, he gradually began to propound the rise of governments: –

At an off-hand definition the Government may be said to be the people who habitually employ policemen. Therefore, I hold that they should be looked at askance by every really human being. I have heard it advanced as a truth that in this country it is the policeman who employs the government, and while there is a good deal of truth in the assertion, still it savours too much of paradox to be properly comprehended by the laity.

It has for a long time been considered that a government is as necessary to a country as a skeleton is to a body, that it is the framework to hold up the mass of its population, which, without its assistance, would resolve itself into indiscriminate slop. It is forgotten, however, that the skeleton to be of any use to the body must be the one that is native to it. In a properly constituted state the government grows simultaneously with the country, but this country has been hung on a foreign government, and so we are in the uncomfortable position of a man endeavouring to grow around some other person's skeleton, with the consequence that every inch of our body politic is raw and painful from being badly adjusted: nor can I possibly imagine how this country will ever adjust itself to the angularities of its alien skeleton.

I believe that every race of men have evolved a species of government best suited to their particular or peculiar needs. When the government has been evolved from within the nation then it may be considered as a projection of the racial consciousness: it is the soul of a country made apparent and articulate. It is a national hand that, feeling always in the line of racial advance, levels obstructions and removes difficulties from the path of her development. When a country ceases to be guided by this internal native conscience then its progress ceases, its destiny is obscure, and no matter how rigorously another nation may regiment it and no matter how many policemen, county court judges, and leader-writers there may be in it, that country must be looked upon as a country without any form of government at all. It then becomes a country without a conscience — a land with no present address and no future objective. Our native land may be said to fit this description accurately.

At one time, and geologically speaking, not very long ago, there were no countries, no nations and no politics: the earth was infested with hordes of predatory mortals, each of whom was his or her own politician, and each of whose politics was directed solely to the appeasement of their respective appetites. The difficulties of

obtaining food, the need of mutual assistance from savage beasts and the gregarious instinct of the race welded these detached and individual politicians into communities of varying extent. The person with the heaviest fist and the lightest conscience welterd his way to the headship of his community and stayed there as long as he was let. To help retain his position he gathered around him his various relatives to whom he allotted portion of the plunder which he had captured. This was the nucleus of government which presently spread into kingships, autocrats, and parliamentary parties.

In order that there should be a sufficiency of plunder to be disposed amongst his relatives (which in these polygamous times would be very numerous) it was necessary that the masses who were governed should be encouraged in every way to become as wealthy as might be on the ground that the more they had the more they could be plundered of: thus industries of every kind were fostered with one hand and skinned with the other, and a benevolence, which was far from actual, became the boast of the Government. This benevolence, however, did not extend to countries outside the jurisdiction of the particular or not too particular, Government. They were prey to be treated as harshly as they would permit.

So, as civilisation spread, the art of government became more and more artful and subterranean in its methods. It became unworthy of the dignity of a king to plunder, as heretofore, with his own royal hands. His blood, through centuries of laziness and disease, has turned as blue as his people's outlook, and, as he was both unable and unwilling to undertake personally the collection of the boodle, various bailiffs, technically called solidiers, sailors, and policemen were bribed to perform this and other cognate offices. These minions, by contact with an unhealthy government, soon became almost as vicious as a king could be. However, they were by law forbidden to be blue, which was the peculiar complexion and prerogative of their masters.

This, in short, indicates the growth of governments, armies, and policemen.

For myself, I am entirely out of sympathy with any form of government at all unless its address is College Green and its membership includes myself. I do not see that this habit is current in nature, saving amongst ants and bees. Neither cats nor dogs would submit to any organised coercion of their fellows, neither do caterpillars, hedgehogs, or sparrows, and these races appear to me

to be doing remarkably well in the absence of statesmen.

I think that Members of Parliament, policemen, and other government officers should be dumped in a damp place for a long period and left there till they grow more and more blue and die of mouldiness. I detest the man who makes speeches forcibly at me, as M.E.P.'s do. I loath men who hit me with batons and then arrest me for not fighting – this is the prime duty of policemen. I despise an institution which pilfers my goods under the name of taxes, and puts me in gaol if I attempt a little private robbery myself.

* * *

The Old Gentleman, in a state of great fury threw my hat on the ground and stamped on it. He apologised profoundly when he noticed it was not his own hat, and offered the latter to me to kick if I pleased: I did not care to do this, whereupon he praised my magnanimity and departed.

Sinn Féin

29 September 1909

Imagination

Imagination is, in its infancy, the art of seeing pictures, in its adolescence, it is the art of making pictures, but in its maturity it must forsake the brush for the pen to express itself with any adequacy. It is next to, and, indeed, preceding technical precision, the first and the greatest asset of the poet and the painter, and not alone are its uses limited to these elegant professions, for when it forms part of the equipment of the man of business its usefulness will be found to outweigh what are commonly regarded as more robust and stable virtues. The ordinary merchant, when dowered with imagination, is transformed into the extraordinary merchant. He becomes a merchant with a mission: he may even develop a conscience, although the science of business, like most other of the sciences, can find little use for this extra sense.

A business man endowed with the faculty of prophecy cannot by any combination of events be baulked of the success which is his ultimate aim, and prophecy is the distinctive attribute of imagination.

It is a mistaken idea which connects imagination with flighty and sensational episodes, or considers it as a feverish, brilliant, and insecure glory, dazzling for a time, but ultimately fizzling out and falling the lower for the heights to which it had precariously clambered.

Real imagination is based on the most stable and steadfast of human experiences. It stands rooted in truth, and when liberated and soaring it does so with wings strengthened by the knowledge of facts and the wisdom which is their attribute. Imagination's finest fruition is to be found in the work of the greatest poets, and great poetry is the highest, and indeed the most laborious work upon which the mind of man can be turned. There are, it is true, poets and poets, just as there are eggs and eggs, the conjunction signifying the difference, and I cannot say which of the two can become the most addled, but while you can throw an egg out of the window, a poet, witness his volume, is a weighty and probably a pugnacious person.

Imagination when not controlled by a rigidly selective wisdom is sheer frenzy and disease. The bounds of imagination are the bounds of the sphere, but when it endeavours to transcend human thought it ceases to be anything more than a curious and freakish exercise in the ridiculous, and is almost invariably the forerunner of madness and incoherency.

It often happens that very learned men are not very great men, their disability being traceable to the lack of imagination, which, with its prophetic ecstasy, can overlap a chasm or bridge an hiatus with but little exertion.

In the work of the painter the presence or absence of this quality is most recognisable, and, even when the painter's hand has attained to the most complete and cunning mastery of his materials, if he has not this one gift he lacks everything and can only be a copyist of his predecessors or an echo of his contemporaries, or a nondescript fozzler adorning a plundered idea for ever and ever. There are a great many of these semi-moribund artists painting pictures which are so dead that one may almost smell their mortality. One breath of life is worth a tornado of personation, and imagination is the life that is lacking.

The extent into which imagination enters in even the most ordinary affairs of human life is very considerable. Each person would be an enigma unsolvable and abrupt to every person were it not for the exercise of imagination. We are all strongly individual and secretive: wrapped tightly and narrowly in ourselves we are never visible to others save when imagination comes bridging the chasms of our silence and the quagmire of our speech, probing to the truth that is within us, and identifying the mapping [of] our personalities with as much fidelity as is possible where such distance and separation is found. I say distance advisedly, for the distance between one human being and another is so spacious as to be terrifying and seemingly unbridgeable. Self-intent and self-conscious we stand apart from all others, only coming, even when seemingly most intimate, into a casual and guarded relation. True we meet and touch at many points, but the contact is only momentary and generally insincere. The badger in his den, or the fox loping by the hedge now has not a more wary eye, or timorous precautionary nose than man looks out of with distrust or wrinkles in alarm. We carry suspicion with us to our graves, and huddle us therein fearing an enemy in the dust and a trap in our winding sheet. Everyone, says our nature, may be an enemy; never surrender completely. Always keep a secret in your pocket.

This chasm of identity is bridged by imagination, and it is imagination guided by wisdom and experience. We interpret our fellow beings by ourselves, and translate them in terms of our own exchequer. This is the work upon which all novelists, poets, painters, and musicians, when they are real artists, are occupied, and their success lies in their fidelity to truth and the greatness of their own souls. No writer, not even excepting the Shakespeares of this art can hope to attain universality. He may be as big [as] the Alps, but he cannot be as big as the Earth. His puppets are only himself transfigured; his adventures are only such as he has experienced or dreamed for himself, and as he is not, like humanity, inexhaustible, he can do no more than add his mite to our knowledge, and having viewed his own soul at every possible focus he passes into the infinite darkness with a seed sown, a word said, and Eternity takes charge of his bequest and watches its fruition.

Imagination is the leap from a fact to a truth, from a theory to a certainty. It is the taking of time by the forelock. It is the communication cord between extremes. It places 'here' and 'there' in juxtaposition. It is the telescope and the microscope of thought. It

is as thin as a spider's web, and as tough as a cable. It is extreme – it is the fright of little minds and the bravery of big ones. It comes to us, parched and sodden in our practicalities, our existences of subterfuge, cunning and snap, with as purifying an influence as when a wind blows freshly through a swamp. It is our interpreter, comforter and promise. It tells us what we were and to where we have attained, and whatever hope we have of climbing the mountain Despair is due to its prophecy. It, and it alone, can look at man and discern the majesty of God.

Sinn Féin

16 October 1909

Irish Idiosyncrasies*

We are all, of course, aware of those idiosyncrasies which have been put to our credit or discredit by other people, and which, even to the present time, are believed by the world at large to represent this country. The humorously careless vagabond, the humorously foolish vagabond, the humorously pugnacious and the humorously criminal vagabonds – vagabondia of all descriptions. I will not say that these ingredients are entirely absent from our national outfit. I sincerely hope not. Humour and carelessness and foolishness and pugnacity may sound much worse than they really are, but I hold that a nation to be healthy must be many-sided and diverse, with energies and curiosities which explore in all directions. Unless among its well-behaved and decorous citizens there is a percentage of physical and moral rebels or reprobates that nation may die of sheer inanition. Of course you may combat such a statement very strongly. I sincerely hope you will.

After this careless and gay, wad-in-a-window kind of Irishman we have been introduced to a different type which is again held up to us as being the Irishman par excellence. He is a lackadaisical

* A Lecture delivered at the Central Branch of Sinn Féin.

misanthrope who spends his time wandering on the shores by lonely waters thinking sad, sad thoughts about nothing in particular. Now, I am not at all sure of the genesis of this individual, but I believe the idea of him took root in England, and was introduced into literature under the title of the Celtic Genius. He is alive to-day and kicking, or rather not kicking – he has not sufficient energy to kick. Now, I warn you against this person. We are quite sufficiently devitalised by a condition of serfdom and a persistent and terrible emigration-drainage without further lessening our vitality by an endeavour to become Mist that Does Be on the Bog types of people who think shoddy poetical thoughts and act shoddy theatrical acts.

Every country has certain local peculiarities or, perhaps, habits of mind which distinguish it from all others.

These we may call national idiosyncrasies. I do not doubt but that from even a slight knowledge of these mental peculiarities it would be easy for a critic to say, This book has been written by a Frenchman, that by a German, and such and such by an Italian or a Spaniard, and it is possible that our critic would only be at fault when a book written by one of his own countrymen was handed to him. Being himself a part of the national mind he might quite conceivably be unable to focus it. He might through mere everyday use and wont be ignorant of matters that were absolutely typical of his own habits of thought and mental outlook.

For this reason we should always read eagerly the opinions of foreigners on our manners, habits, virtues, and vices.

I say vices advisedly, for the vices of a man or a nation are often a surer index to their qualities than their virtues are. Good is sometimes only a negative or passive quality, an absence of evil. Evil is almost always a positive, energetic, and passionate life movement.

I do not mean that we should seek to discover ourselves through the gorged eye of the tripper or the tourist. That eye has room for little more than an hotel, a railway station, and a picture gallery. I merely wish to say that in order to see ourselves we must stand a little away from ourselves: Our own vision of ourselves tends to become rather myopic. We can visualise our country best by looking at other nations.

Now, in delivering a lecture on Irish Idiosyncrasies I labour under this disadvantage, that never having been out of Ireland I have never been far enough away to get a proper look at it, and, consequently, although I have lived all my life in this country, I have never once seen it.

Of course we have, and in bewildering plenty, the impressions of Englishmen who have visited Ireland, and, equally, of course, we all as good Irishmen are firm in the determination that we will not believe a word the man says – we have known that visitor too long. We know that his eye is obscured by prejudice or sentimentality or silliness or some other affliction which prevents him getting us in focus.

Some of these impressions have been manufactured by political touts with very definite and detestable ends. Others are written by well meaning simpletons who mistake Rathmines for the Ireland of today, Donnybrook for the cradle of the race, and a peaceful English shire as our objective. Well, Rathmines is Ireland and Donnybrook is Ireland, and Connemara and Belfast are Ireland. There are, indeed, a great many Irelands in Ireland, but the casual tourist is seldom sufficiently Argus-eyed to detect the basic unity which underlies diversity.

The person, therefore, to whom we should look for guidance in such a matter is the travelled Irishman, who, from some distant land, has turned a 'backward glance over travelled roads' and seen his country from the outside.

I am unfortunate here also, for I have never met the travelled Irishman, or rather he has not travelled in my direction, but I do not think I need apologise if I am unable to deal with this subject with sufficient breadth. There are very few people who are able to visualise or think nationally – this is the peculiar and very scarce gift which goes to the making of a statesman – I do not mean a politician. A statesman is one who having these gifts of vision and thought endeavours to discern the trend of a nation through the flux of political movements of his time, and so in a measure directs its progress. A politician, on the other hand, is a person who often sees national movements with a squint. My business is not to direct the destinies of any nation – I wouldn't be bothered doing it if I could – but to tell stories and write verses, and therefore I do not apologise for not being a statesman and showing you Irish Idiosyncrasies in their relation to Irish progress. Possibly there is someone capable of doing this. I would like to hear Mr Griffith on the subject.

In consideration of the difficulties in my path I will, with your permission, try to give you my impressions on certain aspects of our everyday life which more particularly concern ourselves.

Now, the object of every person going through life should be to criticise as adversely as possible every phase of life which comes into

his ken. And it should be the aim of every person to be difficult to please. One's attitude should mostly be, Yes that is rather good, but it should be better – this law makes for good, but it does not go far enough. Nothing should ever be quite good enough for anyone, and so you make progress.

Criticism that is not destructive is seldom valuable. It is not medicinal until it is nasty. Neither Ireland nor the World can progress by conserving. The great enemies of any country are generally its devoted friends – those who look back and back and cannot tear their rapt vision from the past of ancient greatness to the present of perhaps sodden mediocrity. It is these conservatives, these embalmers of mummy glory, these worshippers of mouldered heroics who manufacture sodden and dispirited mediocrities.

In an age wherein bravery is a common level I do not think that heroes are looked up to with particular veneration. A country where everyone is brave has no inclination or reason to laud so common and work-a-day virtue; but I think that at all times the distribution of the heroic, or any other kind of excessive, energy has been very casual and spare. A man is generally prone to admire those forces which he has not got himself, so that an age given to excessive laudation of personal courage cannot be an age specially remarkable for bravery.

The present generation is not at all free from the poor-spirited outlook, this eye perpetually turned over the shoulder. Heaven knows I do not intend to desecrate the memory of our heroes. There is no one more eager to do reverence to greatness of whatever degree than I am, but I confess that I do pine for live and contemporary greatness. If the spirit of our race was heroic in the past it was not and is not sufficiently magnificent to warrant our wearing dead men's laurels for ever and saluting flags which have faded from human view one thousand years ago.

If our race in its infancy was heroic I can only say that the infancy of all races is heroic. Youth is heroism and beauty and everything that is gracious and desirable and energetic – all life and all greatness comes back to that word – Energy. Genius is energy controlled definitely. Beauty is energy in form, swift curves, strong lines. Good and evil are energies working in opposite directions. And if in the long ago our race was heroic then it is up to us to carry that heroism on and not sit for ever complacently applauding dead deeds. A pupil does honour to his teacher only when he has outstripped his teacher – that is progress.

Another thing I have a quarrel with—that is the peasant. I deplore and reprobate the present glorification of the peasant. I am very sick of peasants. The Abbey Theatre has given us three or four years of undiluted peasant, so has the Theatre of Ireland, so have many of our journals. We are beginning to wear our peasantry as consciously as we do our ancient greatness and our heroes. It is ridiculous every city man of us marching about with a countryman pinned in his hat.

There is another thing strikes me, and that is the astonishing lack of gaiety which is seen in our semi-public gatherings. It is said that Englishmen take their pleasures sadly. We also have, I fear, a middle-aged way of enjoying ourselves. At a ceilidhe there is no gaiety. I have seen a whole room-full of young men and women enjoying themselves with the most deplorable gravity. Their self-restraint was rigorous, their dancing reverent, and their singing ridiculous. I would like to point out that singing and dancing are not serious or reverent occupations. Their chief, their only virtue, lies in spontaneity. They are the language of the body in freedom. Surely, dancing ought to be the most unrestrained emotional outbreak that one can be capable of; it is freedom in excess, energy exuberant and untrammelled, sheer physical gaiety unashamed and rampant. Now, can anyone say that our dances at all approximate to these ideals. I have seen a young man dancing who had pruned all his exuberance to the thinnest edges. Nothing moved about him but his feet, while the rest of his body tried to look as if it knew nothing about those infantile prancings; his arms were rigid, his face was as expressionless as a wall, and he danced so with all the gravity of a man engaged in mental arithmetic. When one really dances one should use one's legs and arms and eyes, and, indeed, if you can wag your ears you should do it. I have heard a young man sing a comic song, and he sang it with the same rigid respectability as the other danced. Now, I would like to lay this down as a law, that the man who sings a comic song should sing it in a comic manner, and should use every artifice he is capable of to make it laughable, and that the man who obliges with a dance should try to look as if he were enjoying himself.

I would also postulate as a fundamental truth that seriousness in a young man or woman is a repulsive vice. Life is not a matter of duty, but of inclination. Nationality is a very universal privilege. It should not make for middle age and corrugated brows and responsible foreheads. At a ceilidhe I hate to hear war songs and war songs and

war songs chanted meekly. We must not try to confuse things. We go to a ceilidhe to enjoy ourselves, not to preserve our country. I would sooner hear a girl sing badly from lightheartedness than hear a prima donna sing only because she had a good voice. I would rather see an urchin dancing around a barrel organ in a back lane than watch a reel being rigidly and respectably massacred by an expert martyr to duty.

One of the greatest assets any country can have is the youth of its people and their gaiety – there is very little else in any country worth preserving. These are the virtues of a people – to be able to sing and dance and laugh and fight. There are not any other goods in life. Outside of these there remains only the sordid and horrible necessities of existence – hunger and work; weariness and despair and death.

It is singular to think of the things we do in the name of enjoyment. Happiness is a lost art, or rather it has become a craft. We pay people at the theatre to make us merry, as if you could ever be made merry by payment – that is not gaiety, it is fever. There is no person in the world can make you merry or wise or good but yourself only – Sinn Fein is wider than you may fancy. Merriment is not a comedian on a stage – it is yourself with a bounding pulse. Wisdom is not to be found in any book, or University, however New. It is the fruit of your own experience standardised. Goodness is not the exegesis of a clergyman – it is the sane morality of yourself. We don't even play games now – we pay other people to play them. There is only one way to enjoy a game, and that is to be one of the players.

There is a word of which the majority of our men seem to fight shy of speaking – that is beauty. I want to see the idea of beauty brought into Irish life again – it is very much absent from it. It is the widest and wisest word in any language. It means philosophy and sanity and merriment and greatness. It is a tragedy and comedy. It is everything that is high and single-thinking and heart-moving. But it cannot exist in a country of middle-aged men and women such as ours may be drilled into. It cannot exist in a country of slaves or sycophants or foolish people. It demands freedom; indeed it confers it.

There are a great many clubs in this country formed for all kinds of wild purposes, to play chess, to debate uninteresting and turgid politics, to debate all kinds of weirdly uninteresting matters. I would like to see clubs formed for the propagation of the idea of beauty.

Bands of young men who would not be ashamed to be seen chasing the moon on a night time and noting among themselves how the clouds looked when the moon sailed into and out of them. Believe me there would be great delight to be gathered from such excursions.

There is some eastern nation has a saying to this effect. 'If you have twopence buy some bread with one penny, and with the other buy a flower of the white narcissus.' That is not only a proverb; it is also a philosophy – it ought to be a religion. It does not indicate only a love of and a camaraderie with beauty, it is also sanity and high-thinking and tense, abundant life. What have we to put beside this in the way of proverbs? A collection of ready made English flatulences, sordid, dirt-grubbing, materialisms, such as A stitch in time saves nine, or that ineffective and cowardly compromise – Half a loaf is better than no bread, or the equally futile Bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and Silks and satins put out the kitchen fire – a proverb certainly to sneer at. All the proverbs we have are materialistic, canny and base, and have crawled laboriously from the grosser aspects of our existence.

I do believe that the country which has not got beautiful, careless proverbs cannot for long be a free country. There is slavery in its bones. Its people are certainly slaves to their own existence; they are chained to their necessities and kowtow to their fate abjectly. It is a fine thing to be able, if only for a short time, to rise superior to the pettinesses of life. It is easily possible to take too much thought for tomorrow, and, indeed, it is this careful and penurious outlook which, in these latitudes, has made life timorous and pettifogging, a system of compromises and shufflings that is degrading and indecent.

Of course I am aware that the proverbs I have quoted are not Gaelic; they are English, and they prophesy to me more insistently than German Dreadnoughts the degradation and downfall of that race.

Another subject I would like to touch upon is the much debated question of bigotry and tolerance. Toleration is everywhere held up to us as one of the cardinal virtues. We are told that to be bigoted is to be unjust and uncivilised. That bigotry is an uncouth, barbaric atavism, and toleration a shining, civilised virtue. Let me tell you that the decay of bigotry in a man or a nation is a sign of moral and mental slackness. No man with real blood in his veins can be tolerant about anything that really matters to him. Intolerance

(except when allied to the crassest ignorance) means strong living faith. Every person who really believes a thing is bigoted in that particular belief. Your broad-minded individual whose kind toleration embraces impartially the wide world, is simply a person who has not sufficient moral fibre to believe anything. Belief, [in] reality, is a fire that flames into the most ardent and furious proselytism. Anyone can afford to be tolerant who has not strong feeling in any direction. We are getting too tolerant in Irish life, and with the loss of our bigotry we stand to lose many national virtues and enthusiasms which it is not good we should lose. In short, bigotry is a life force. Tolerance is decadence and disease.

I sigh for a race of strong Pessimists: the Optimist has been held up to us too long as the happy human person – he is nothing of the kind. The optimist is a comfortable and contented individual the fatness of whose body has invaded his mind. He thinks through a complacent snooze and sees only through his consummated dinner. As a matter of fact, it is the pessimist who is, at bottom, the real optimist. He sees things are wrong, and refuses to be contented and happy in an atmosphere of lies and complacencies. He it is who demands millenniums while the optimist finds a spurious animal satisfaction in every good dinner, or increase of wages or new job that comes to him. Therefore I say beware of optimism and toleration and content.

The great thing for a man or a nation is to be single and unsatisfied. By single I mean self-contained and mobile. By unsatisfied I mean ambitious and energetic. A contented man or nation is a dead-and-alive thing. The contented man has lost all ambition, all hope, all feeling for reverence, or freedom, or beauty – he does not want these things, they would only worry him: but the discontented man has kept these, and has, moreover, a personal sting behind all that will set him looking for them. The discontented man is, I hold, the only happy person. He is a man buoyed up by hope. As a matter of fact he could not be discontented at all unless he was hopeful. It is hope and faith that makes him discontented, while your contented man has bade farewell to the future and exists only as a vegetable does.

It is this splendid discontent that still gives me hope for our country. We have not yet thrown up the sponge and sat down to vegetate as a quiet and happy English shire. As long as we retain our discontent Ireland will continue to be something more than a geographical expression. She will still be a nation, an entity with a

practical and impulsive existence and a future, with ambition and hope spreading out beyond the horizons and with all her possibilities of freedom and greatness and majesty intact – and impending.

The past is a good place to write about, to debate about, and to observe with curious, scientific, or affectionate interest. But the past is not a good place to live in. There is bad air there. It is haunted by ghosts and memories. Its goods have been delivered, all its accounts are squared. Out of that vast pit there comes to us nothing but here and there a little song with uncouth prosody, here and there a snatch of strange, barbaric melody. In a measure both the past and the present are for ever with us, and both are of infinitely great importance. The past is the root out of which we are springing, the future is that strange blossom to which we are so laboriously growing. But it is to the future all our energies must be directed. Whatever strange and wonderful blossom is to grow on the summit of the tree of life it is to that all our powers must be extended. The growth of that is the important thing. All the diverse nationalities, the separate and jealous civilisations, the individual and stringent bigotries, all the groupings of art and stars, the clusters of crafts and suns will meet at some point and grow from thence to that consummating flower of life. The secret of each nation, of all national rivalries and bitternesses, is the unexpressed aspiration of each to be the branch to which all the others must converge, to impose on all other nations its own culture and take those other diverse nationalities into itself, absorb and merge them into one world growth and be itself the branch of the attainment.

The Egyptians imposed their weird, subterranean wisdom on the world and passed away. The Greeks came with the subtlest, most graceful materialism and passed away. The Romans, with a culture as rigid as mathematical formulae, have been denied. The Hebrews, with their austere and majestic concepts, bid strongly for the intellectual world sovereignty and many others. All of the nations in their turn have come forward laying the best growth of their national life as before some great world-altar. And all these gifts have been accepted and woven into the warp and woof of human existence, amplifying and amending thought and progress in the fullest measure. Our country, too, has expressed that craving. It also has given gifts to the world. It also has sent out its apostles and martyrs and preached the gospel of its nationality and its culture in distant places. Once it, too, imposed a culture and a particular fire on other peoples, and it can claim to have profoundly influenced the

direction of European thought. It may again. I cannot credit that the unparalleled travail of this land has been undertaken for nothing, or that the rigour to which she has been subjected for so long will have no appeasement and no victory. I look for the coming of the Gael to be that branch of the nations to preach our own doctrine of life and freedom and beauty. Freedom, the meaning of that most holy of words is almost forgotten by the drilled and disciplined peoples of to-day. There is less liberty of life now than has ever been before. For liberty we have trade – the liberty to cheat wherever we can. For beauty we have theatrical corporations, for energy we have policemen and armaments, for philosophy and religion we have suicide. I hope, I believe the new gospel will be preached by this nation which through such barren and dreary centuries has clung to the idea of freedom with such passionate singleness and tenacity.

Sinn Féin

7 May 1910

Good and Evil

In delivering a lecture wherein a great many diverse matters have to be dealt with on the wing, dogmatic statements cannot be avoided. There is no time for minute definition. Very diffuse ideas must be compressed into tabloid form, and these apparently dogmatic utterances must stand more for sign-posts than for dogmatisms. In them the sum of a line of thought is indicated which the audience can afterwards elucidate for themselves, and, if necessary, reject.

Nothing in the world is absolute. Fluidity, mobility, are the passwords of nature. Every object or thought has its other side. Every truth is only a partial statement and is subject to the disqualifications of its partiality. A lie cannot pass unless underlying the airy bubble of fiction there is the basic plausibility of fact. Blow away the bubble and there is verity beneath it. By the fluxion of time, a truth can become as asthmatic or rheumatic as any respectable old gentleman. Now I am not writing these elementary

matters at 'Eilis,' who is a lady of wit and wisdom, and I am happy to say, my own good friend; but they lead me to the point whereon we disagree.

'Eilis,' I take it, postulates that good and evil are two separate forces, basic and unalterable, which never meet, and which are continually and bitterly antagonistic. I, on the other hand, believe that good and evil work together like competing brothers, and, being only the extremes or poles of one principle, there is not the distance between them that is usually believed; indeed, like all extremes, they meet in the middle and merge imperceptibly the one into the other, with the best of results. But (and here I join issue with 'Eilis'), it must not be supposed that I intend to glorify evil at the expense of good. I only hold that good cannot exist without evil, and that both exist and are making for that greater virtue which we all believe will be the consummation of things.

I say that 'all things come back to the word Energy.' It may be necessary for me here to explain the meaning of the terms Energy and Force. Force is the power which binds things together, grips in and tightens and compresses, and which, if it were not interfered with and hindered, would ultimately squeeze this world into a barren, lifeless rock—a fate which has already befallen the moon. Energy is the power which expands, and is continually bursting through and through the shackles of Force, renewing and sweetening and making room for life. The movement of Force is inwards, of Energy outwards, and should either of these movements fail then life would be either crushed out or blasted out.

All motion may be expressed in one or other of these terms. Civilisation is a Force tending more and more to be central and inclusive. Art is an Energy striving always outwards and exclusive. Law is Force, Disorder is Energy. Good is Force, Evil is Energy. Each extreme is the police of the other. If good had not to fight for its existence against the disruptions of evil it would become stagnant and perish of inanition. If evil were not rigidly policed by good it would expire of its own reckless anarchy. Force is acquisitive, Energy is inquisitive (or, it would suit my purpose better to say, outquisitive). The one would die under the weight of its own possessions if the other did not keep it jumping about to protect them from arson or dynamite.

The reason I insist on the necessity for Energy or Evil as a passionate life-movement is because the gigantic Force which is represented by civilisation draws with such enormous centripetal

weight towards centralisation and, in the end, stagnation, that Energy, if too severely controlled, can scarcely move between its close-packed particles and give it breathing space. Of course each of these powers tries to express itself to the fullest extent, but that is only the striving of all things towards accomplishment and death, and it is this striving which marks the apparent warfare between them. I say apparent warfare because the success of either is suicide. Not only good and evil, force and energy exist by warfare or interaction, life, of whatever shape, exists only by this interaction, and in either direction it becomes vice as soon as it becomes a non-combatant.

As for vice, I have nothing good to say. Just as holiness is the barren or finished extreme of good so vice is the extreme of evil, and a very ugly and unhealthy extreme it is. It plays an important part, however, in the human polity, weeding out perpetually the unfit, incapable, or diseased. Vice has no glamour for healthy people, they are attracted either by good or evil, by force or energy, and are life factors in perpetuity. Holiness renounces life inevitably, and seeking Nirvana perishes of anaemia. Vice crawls to a despicable grave in the gutter and vanishes root and branch. There is an astounding impartiality, or, if you like, impertinence, in nature.

As regards the partial qualities of all statements, not even my prose is exempt from this limitation; I would draw 'Eilis's' attention to my usage of the words 'sometimes' and 'almost' in the sentence she reprobates in my lecture.

Sinn Féin

21 May 1910

On Politeness

I do not know out of what flux of emotion the idea of politeness emerged. That it came slowly there is no doubt. That it grew painfully, with many lapses and often complete disappearances, seems probable. Nowadays everybody is polite according to their lights and these lights are mostly feeble. But there must have been a time when this virtue was a vice and one only indulged in by

weak-minded people. We are only now climbing out of the vague, diffuse state of warfare which nourished us, and to many men politeness has still an aspect of cowardice which does not entirely recommend it, or, at least, of which they are slightly ashamed.

This appearance of cowardice is easily understood in connection with politeness – the step from courtesy to humility is not always a great one. The distinction between grace and femininity is to certain people rather blurred, and the fixed idea of bravery for the male and fear for the female will not readily be exorcised from the majority of minds. Politeness, from a partial view, has many feminine attributes, graces and refinements which seem to partake of the nature of, if not timidity, at least compromise and hesitancy, both matters for distrust under conditions of rigour.

Any of the finer arts or graces are apt in unpractised hands to be slightly overdone, and thus the perfect sparkle of good breeding may rapidly merge into the slime of sycophancy. One should wear one's breeding easily or not at all. The very essence of it is that it shall be spontaneous and unconscious. For the slightest taint of awkwardness or art in manners brands one instantly as a snob or a dandy – both unpleasant beings.

And yet good breeding is not at all a monopoly of the monied class. Of course, among people of wealth and leisure good breeding (comprising a host of matters, dress, deportment, behaviour, and many other subsidiary attachments), becomes a cult and crystallises ultimately into formulae of the most rigorous exactitude – one may do this and one may not do that. Proscriptions and prescriptions, often obsolete and unwieldy, are welded sternly into wiser and kindly regulations. Against formulae it is the chief business of all artists and reformers to rebel – with due appreciation. All abstract things, all wisdoms, customs, religions, and procedures of any kind inevitably harden into formulae, but they do not become thus compact and bloodless until they are almost obsolete, and the breaking up, redistribution and revaluating of the fragments marks the progress of humanity.

Almost all the virtues which are now in ordinary practice seem to have been evolved out of warfare. I think we may take it that up to this generation war has been the great civilising agent, the machinery used by nature to shape us to a more perfect understanding of ourselves, our abilities and limitations, and a greater appreciation of our neighbours and their basic kinship in spite of the barriers of language, religion or colour. Fear also has been a great

shaping tool in social evolution. The knowledge that uncouth or hasty behaviour might be vigorously resented has imposed ideas of caution and thoughtfulness which might not have ripened but for these ruder threatening elements.

But while warfare and the cult have done a great deal to standardise our impressions of amity other factors are necessary to give it the breath of life. Such are good-will and freedom. At the back of all politeness there must be a personal kindness and an exemption from the *quid pro quo*, and, therefore, until Utopia is founded, politeness will not be a static but a progressive virtue. It is not at all a universal accomplishment, it may be met with in the cottages of the humble and it may not, for such cottages have often good-will but never freedom. It will be discovered in palaces, but there also freedom does not flourish. Therefore, I consider that even yet real politeness is an isolated, solitary virtue striving to maintain itself by good-will alone in a world the conditions of which are mainly those of a prison.

There is, however, a thin and often disgusting veneer which with many people passes muster for politeness. Behind the outward expressed civility there is not always the guiding good-will or kindness. The form has so often to do duty for the substance and that duty is but ill performed in many cases. The person who stamps on one's foot and then begs forgiveness with a lack-lustre eye and a languid voice is not, although he may think he is, being polite. Politeness seldom treads on corns physical or mental. In that, perhaps, it discovers the defects of its quality: for in life a persistent, a determined trampling on intellectual corns is not only necessary, but imperatively so. But that lack-lustre conventional, formularised good breeding is certainly a vulgar weed in the garden of good manners.

In this respect women are greater offenders than men. One expects women from the tone of their minds, from their mere physical charm, and also from their chief function of motherhood, to have conserved more of kindness and refinement than men, and one is correspondingly shocked when the contrary becomes evident. Women in this way will be guilty of rudeness of which the majority of men would be heartily ashamed.

A friend of mine sat in a tram—can anyone tell me why persistent tram-riding should be perverting to morals?—and into this tram entered a lady and her husband. As the tram was crowded with other ladies my friend at once surrendered his seat to the latest

comer, who accepted it, first with graceful protestations and, finally, with apparently grateful thanks. My friend stood outside warmed with the consciousness of a good deed done. Later the lady's husband, who had been speaking to the conductor, entered, and observing his wife seated said, 'I thought the car was full, how did you manage to get a seat?' To which the lady replied, 'O, that old fool out there gave me his.' . . . All the warmth induced by his good deed faded from my unfortunate friend, but being a choleric man he fanned the fires of his own indignation until he scorched again. After a moment or two he re-entered the tram and, with a smile of honeyed wrath, addressed the lady, 'I think my paper is under you, ma'am,' said he – the lady arose and my friend instantly sat down in her place, observing that 'the old fool has his seat again, and won't leave it,' and despite the reiterated invitations of her husband to 'come out and have his nose pulled,' he kept his seat until his journey was accomplished, when he quitted it with reluctance.

The protestations and thanks of that lady indicate the system of conventional and heartless civility which so often passes for politeness. Behind her expressions and smiles there was neither kindness nor common humanity. Such polite people should, in my opinion, be killed swiftly and buried at night time in desolate places, and for them there should be no hope of reincarnation, except, maybe, as toads or vipers, in which characters they would be altogether at home and incapable of riding on trams.

Sinn Féin

17 September 1910

Facts

When a person, making a statement, clinches it with the customary 'and that's a fact,' he may actually mean 'and that's a Truth.' A fact by itself is a bald and unfruitful symbol, being no more than the statement or designation of an object, but in the conjunction of facts the idea derived from one or more of them is Truth.

Somebody, probably a fool, has said that facts are stubborn things. The dicta of a fool carry deadly weight, and are generally so massive that the intelligence cannot lift from under them, and so, by the force of inertia, their statements flatten out into proverbs and are accepted and passed as the authentic currency of thought. Proverbs may be called Tabloids of Thought, and these, like all other tinned or sealed foods, can be kept too long and go sour and poisonous, but, generally, when accepted with the limitations with which all brief statements are charged they are excellent food for reflective and dull minds – no phrase can ever attain to perfect roundness. Completion is not possible in either a sentence or a dictionary, vista is behind both and distance, letting one out on the infinite and measureless. Every utterance is portion of an organism, drawing blood from myriad sources and with its roots spread into the widest sweep of human thought. The beginning of any sentence automatically predicates profound and varied knowledge, and the end of it, when gazed into, reveals limitless existences.

A statement which has only one face is termed a fact: like the moon, this cannot be got round, nor can it be amended, and in this latter quality is found the stubbornness of the proverb. But it is often forgotten that this stubbornness is a purely temporary affection, and deserts a fact just as soon as life deserts it – for a fact, like everything else within our ken, is subject to the laws of life and death. It is born, fed, grows, attains its maximum, and decays out of existence, and it is no more, saving in the translated form in which every living thing persists. The genesis of Truth is this – a fact born out of theory, fed by observation, growing by experience and flowering into Truth, and the decay of a fact is the decimation of the object with which it is intimately connected.

To say 'I am' is to make a statement which has only one face and is, therefore, a fact; but my 'amness' is only temporary or local and in a short time will be lost – a while ago 'I wasn't' and in a little time 'I won't be' and my 'am' and 'I' will be so widely distributed as to be unmeasurable, if not unthinkable. Of course, the fact that 'I was' still persists, but a statement of that negative description is so tenuous as to be negligible.

A fact and a man require locality before either can qualify for citizenship in the community of their kind. I, for instance, am a fact in Dame street, but in Chimborazo or Timbuctoo I am a myth; so a fact is a fact only in its own habitat and outside of that it is a lie. A fact without an address is a vagrant and a masterless stroller which

should be clapped in the stocks when found as a danger to public morality and a loiterer with intent.

A fact is recognisable solely by this – that it is, i.e. that it has being. Anything that has life is a fact; anything that is dead is a negation or nothing. A tree is a fact, cut it down and (observe the plasticity and elasticity of facts) instantly the fact alters to meet the altered circumstances. The tree fact is annihilated and a wood fact takes its place and it, also, is prepared to further change with the transmutations of the object, until at last the wood is burnt and the fact disappears in its smoke.

All facts inhere in the concrete. There is no such thing as an abstract truth: you cannot see, feel, smell, or in anywise get into relations with an abstraction; therefore, there cannot be an abstract fact. The attributes of a substance are not abstractions, but, inhering in the substance, they make it, being the peculiar and distinctive properties which go to make the object it, and no other. A fact, too, has its attribute; it is Truth, and the particular attribute of Truth is usefulness. A truth which cannot be worked with, sent out for interest and made bring it home, must have a deceased fact for its father and an abstraction for its dam: there is a hole in its pedigree somewhere and it ought to be sacked.

Facts are gregarious, living in community, and all are dependent and interdependent. A solitary fact, if such could be found, would, on examination, prove to be diseased, lunatic and senile, cast out from the body corporate by reason of its untrustworthiness. Sometimes these rogue facts persist for quite a considerable time, but at length such must die of sheer inanition and bloodlessness and are nailed on the counter of thought as counterfeit, chipped, cracked, base, and out of the currency. Around every fact cluster its relations in ever-increasing circles each holding to the other by a small guiding rope of thought, and thus one fact can be seen gliding into and mixing with another with scarcely perceptible resistance. It is this incessant flux and elasticity which is responsible for what are called 'new facts.' A new fact is an old vista at a new focus. Examine any of these and you will discover that they are composed of venerable and well-used old facts.

Truth is the proved and stated experience of humanity, dating from the observance of one or more facts and working on the family lines of these facts to an end which is generally calculable and which should never be surprising. A well used proverb says 'Truth is stranger than fiction'; that is only another method of saying that fact

is stranger than fancy. There is not in the world any such thing as fancy or fiction, there is only fact and any artist attempting to work on the figments which fancy and fiction now stand for would be unable to write or think two consecutive paragraphs. It is impossible to write about what you cannot perform, and to perform a fiction is to do something which is outside the grip of human thought and experience. The habitation of fiction is Nowhere and that is a very good residence for Nothing to live in. Of course, any intelligent person can, with a little practice, tell a lie, but a lie exists only in the misapplication of a truth. You can contort anything for a period but not for ever. You can see double if you press your eyeball, or become sufficiently intoxicated, and so, also, you can put a fact out of focus by misdirected ingenuity.

Sinn Féin
1 October 1910

A Gaelic League Art Exhibition

A friend who had spent some time in Holland not long ago unpacked for me his bales of memories and observations. He had many pleasant things to tell me about policemen and railway porters and the people who serve in cafés, and (inter alia) he discussed or rather explained the attitude of Dutchmen towards their local artists. It appears that Dutchmen think more of their own artists than they do of French or Italian painters and that they do not wait for a foreigner to praise a local artist before they dare to discover him for themselves. My friend said that the average Hollander was acquainted with the works of his parochial artists and could criticise these with some competence. They were even aware of the existence of their younger struggling artists, were interested in the gradual development of their technique, and were warm and discriminating partisans in those rivalries and quarrels which seem the proper atmosphere of the studio.

These statements wiped away from my eyes swathes of misconception. Up to that time I had visualized a Dutchman as a sort of eccentric comedian who held a vast pipe in one hand, an equally vast beer-jug in the other, whose gaze was vacant, whose hair was tousled, who wore boots made of mahogany, and a great patch on the slack of his breeks.

It is a pity that we have not in this country a similar appreciation of and intimacy with our artists. Of course we all know the work of certain painters, but our attention has been drawn to them through the columns of English art journals, and as soon as our own men and women are criticised in these same papers we may awaken to the knowledge that in Ireland also there are people who paint pictures and are trying to make a living by the sale of them. This last fact does not strike the average person with sufficient force. To such a one an artist is a wild-eyed and romantic adventurer, who paints pictures and makes love and has no thought for the morrow. But an artist has to labour hard and lovingly in two directions; one is to paint a picture with all the craft he is capable of, the other is, having painted his picture, to sell it. I have seen a man playing a fiddle in the street while all the world listened. Then the fiddler ambled towards his audience with his hat projected and his audience ambled away with pensive and melancholy visages. That is how artists are treated in this country. Our people can give you the pedigree of a horse and tell you the names of the horses of promise at any given time. They can tell you the names of the various comedians whose red noses have blazed across the Empire foot-lights, but they cannot so often tell the names of their greater artists and don't know anything at all about the younger.

Some of these artists are members of the Gaelic League, and this week there is an exhibition of their paintings at the rooms of Craobh na gCuigi, No. 7 Stephen's Green, which is well worth visiting. There are in all 97 pictures shown, comprising landscapes, almost all of which are of local interest, and portraits of Irish people, besides a few pieces of very fine sculpture. As an exhibition the average is very high, and many of the pictures are of quite surprising excellence and strength. So fine indeed are those latter that one is amazed at the ridiculously inadequate prices quoted against them in the catalogue.

Sinn Féin

15 October 1910

Caricatures

I

He was a tall and rather loosely-built man. When he turned round he did it with a swinging movement and all his clothing whirled around with him. That was because he was very thin, and there was not really so much inside his clothing as one at first imagined. His face was rather short, his head was very round, and had an instant impression of blackness, his hair thatched it about minutely, growing very close and short. His eyes were coloured like dull agates, his lips, rather small and pensive, were continually drawing deeply inwards, while he poked his chin outwards, and this he fingered perpetually in an abstraction that was packed with thought.

II

She wobbled down the path like a perambulating sack. Her skirt was made of black silk, and the sun shone off it as if it were sorry for touching her. This skirt was so long and thick that no remotest hint of a limb or even of a boot was visible, so that, while at times one thought of a perambulating sack, at times also her movement was of so unified a texture, that one fancied she had dummy legs, with small wheels set under them. Her face was broad and red and important, her nose was little and pink and very important, and her lips jutted out with an implacable determination to do something which someone had begged her not to do. She carried an umbrella in a strong grip, which defied people to steal it, and when she passed a man she stared at him as if he was a person who would steal umbrellas if he got the chance. When she passed women she did not look at them at all. It was quite plain that she disapproved of women, and only faintly approved of men.

III

He stood outside the door. You could easily know that it was his own shop – his attitude proclaimed it. He was in his shirt sleeves. From his shoulders depended a wide apron of white calico, with one pocket in the right-hand side, and the lower portion of this apron was usually rolled around his hands to keep them warm. He often stood for a few moments looking up and down the street. His face was clean shaven, except just under the ears where his hair sneaked down into whiskers and meeting his chin sidled away underneath it into the decent obscurity of his collar. His forehead had been low at one time, but now it climbed away on a vast curve that halted suddenly two inches from the nape of his neck. All around his head at about the height of his ears, there was a patchiness, a doggedly vindictive hairiness that clung in a panic, tooth and nail, to his scalp as bushes straggle desperately on the fringes of a desert. One could imagine these patches becoming tired and at last letting go a grip that wasn't worth while, sliding with tremendous velocity down his sleek cranium, skidding across the great fat billow at the back of his collar, tobogganning down his shoulder and away to the east wind and the horizon and the sea, around the curve of the planet, and down stooping deeply to the moon, where they would grow happily on the face of the great Man in Possession – and if these things happened the person I tell of wouldn't mind a bit because he was meant to be the Baldest Man in the World.

Sinn Féin

22 October 1910

The Old Philosopher Discourses on Lawyers

When I entered the Old Philosopher was poring on a long official-looking document. So deeply engaged was he that my salutation passed unnoticed, and it was not until I clasped his fingers about the

neck of a tankard that he really noticed me. He slid two inches of liquor into himself and addressed me very severely.

* * *

I hate cruelty. When a man kicks a dog I yelp. My quarrel is not that a man has hurt a dog but that he has hurt me, for being a higher organism and more nervously constructed I am able to imagine a greater degree of agony than the dog is able to feel, and therefore the person who kicks a dog does me a grievous bodily injury and should in any properly constituted country be liable to recoup me in damages for personal assault. It is unfortunate that this cannot be done. The last thing to admit of progress in any community is its legal machinery. Practically every other political and social institution can hobble close to the skirts of its contemporary progress, and it is, therefore, astonishing to find lawyers and law almost telescopically distant, in an historical sense, from the days in which they collect their fee or issue their rhadamantine pronouncements.

In his unofficial capacity the lawyer is so much like an ordinary man that he might easily be mistaken for one. But a closer scrutiny will reveal that the lawyer, like policemen, members of Parliament, rats, ballad-vocalists, and tinned salmon, is a distinct species. The instinct for preservation has taught many respectable creatures to pretend to be something which they are not, and thus by a cunning subterfuge evade the appetites of their enemies. Thus a certain worm which, on account of the law of libel, shall be nameless, converts itself into the semblance of a piece of stick and winks gently to itself as the early bird hops onward fasting. There are wily insects who transform themselves into the similitude of leaves, blades of grass, pebbles, and other innutritious miscellania, while the goat who was taken to be a stroller-O is an historical example well known to the historian. Lobsters in a spirited attempt to escape the pot strive to look like aldermen but are readily detected by their smell of which they are very proud. This personation is also practised by lawyers. In his native state a lawyer wears a horsehair wig, a black gown and a handbag; all of these by an aberration of Providence are detachable, as are his morals, and at the will of this creature may be laid aside, when it appears so closely to resemble a human being that even experts have been deceived by the forgery. They are,

however, easily domesticated and tamed, and seldom bite children unless they are paid to do so, but it should be remembered that their bite is very malignant and frequently fatal. They can speak with greater fluency than parrots, but not quite so intelligently. In training one of these creatures to talk it is usual to cut its tongue with a guinea and give a strong bromide injection, when it will repeat very rapidly – My Lud, my fee, my unfortunate client. Their food consists chiefly of fees and briefs chopped very fine: this should be diversified by an occasional plaintiff or defendant served raw but skinned. The skin of their prey is generally converted into parchment upon which the lawyer will engross deeds, wills, and so forth at 4s, the folio. A large trade is done in these curios which are bought eagerly by litigants who worship them when their mothers are not looking.

Lawyers are indigenous in almost every country of the world and can bear the extremes of cold and heat with singular composure. They are particularly plentiful in the House of Commons where they are preserved with such stringency that a man would probably be put in gaol if he shot one. In this they resemble the sacred birds of Egypt and the crocodiles of the Ganges, and it is possible that superstition will prolong their days for a yet considerable period. Most of their time there is occupied in grinding axes of which every lawyer has at least one. When these are completed they are known as Axe of Parliament. They are sold to the public at extraordinary charges and are usually found so bad to work with that another one has to be bought to supplement the deficiencies of the first, which is good for their trade.

When a lawyer attains maturity he gets married just like a Christian. His wife is generally a real woman and the personation of her mate is of so artistic a quality that she does not know she has married a lawyer until it is too late for her to retreat or repent. But habit which forms so large a part of the female polity usually reconciles them to their mates, and as everything ceases to be strange when you live with it the wife of a lawyer comes to regard the strangeness of her husband with a less curious eye and drifts from tolerance to a lamentable acquiescence.

It is indeed strange to reflect that the conduct of so many important affairs in life should have been allowed to lapse into the hands of these people; who for their own ends must complicate an already sufficiently complex civilisation. It is very unlikely that a person whose livelihood depends on the interpretation of laws will

sunder himself from his emoluments and dignities by framing enactments requiring no such expert exegesis, and until all lawyers are recognised as criminals and put in gaol on sight I see little prospect of progress winning free from their enactments, machinations, subterfuges and chicaneries.

* * *

When the old gentleman departed I found he had dropped the official-looking paper which he had been perusing when I entered. I had time only to observe that the document was a writ of summons at the instance of a landlady when he returned and after describing certain persons as impertinent and inquisitive busybodies from whom not even one's private correspondence was sacred, he stamped thrice on his own foot and leaped haltingly from the tavern.

Sinn Féin

10 June 1911

Prose Writings: 1912-15

By 1912 Stephens had taken up additional causes: women's suffrage, labour, and freedom of speech. His attitude toward women had undergone a change. In 'The Seoinin,' women are treated stereotypically: they don't make proverbs; they are more anti-Irish than men; men are stronger; men should 'kill mice and bogies of whatever nation or denomination' on behalf of their women and should walk 'ahead' of women. The only woman singled out for unqualified praise is Caitlin ni Houlihan, the traditional embodiment of Ireland, who demonstrates the 'feminine' virtues: kindness, tenderness, hospitality and forgiveness.

In 'The Populace Mind,' he announces that he is in favour of the vote for women and also approves of 'equality in certain economic and personal directions.' He speaks derisively of 'the stained-glass woman,' and urges a strengthening of the 'intellectual' side of Irishwomen through better education. The influences behind these changes in opinion are at least two, his wife Cynthia, who was a woman of considerable strength of character and culture, and his observation of French women during his stay in Paris. 'I wonder is it sexual freedom which has made the women so self-possessed,' he wrote in a letter to his neighbour in Ireland, Thomas Bodkin (*Letters*, p. 58).

'In Shining Armour,' like several of the patriotic essays in *Sinn Féin*, adopts a comic stance on a serious subject. Anger over moral crusaders who try to crack down on the smuttiness of the music hall leads Stephens to object that it is really *bad*, not *blue* art.

'Come Off That Fence' and 'An Essay in Cubes' sparked controversy. In the first article, Stephens addresses the Irish workers, urging them to fight capitalism, the newspapers, and the clergy. He also praises James Larkin, the socialist leader of the General Strike of 1913, for remaining true to his principles during the period of his incarceration in Mountjoy Prison. Apparently what occasioned the article was a 'goody-goody' anti-strike statement found in a sermon by the Rev. J. C. O'Flynn and published in the *Irish Independent*. Since that newspaper was owned by William Martin Murphy, Chairman of the Dublin United Tramways Company and a leader of the management opposition to the strike, it was not surprising that Stephens included newspapers in his targets. The attack on the

employers seemed to have passed unchallenged, but when he let go with a furious anti-clerical statement, Stephens lost the support of several liberal priests. As he later admitted, these lines caused quite a stir and the label of 'Anti-Christ' in some Irish papers: 'In Ireland today the Church is a lie. The attitude of the clergy throughout this dispute has been cynical and disgusting to the last degree' ('Come Off That Fence').

'An Essay in Cubes' sets forth equally strong opinions on a number of literary figures. Fielding is characterized as glib, Meredith as cruel, Scott, Dumas, and Dickens as emotional, Hardy as morally cowardly; even George Moore, declared the best of the lot, is 'dominated' by Darwinian naturalism. Stephens' explanation to a fellow writer, Stephen MacKenna, of the title of the article not only suggests a growing interest in contemporary art, perhaps attributable to his stay in Paris, but an apology for his poorly-constructed case:

I called it an Essay in Cubes because, like the Cubist pictures, its eye is sometimes on its knee & its ear on its shoulder. God watches over the unity of most things & that there is a unity in the Article is more due to him than to me. But it skips & dives & drops & between one sentence & the next there is often a chasm, to be bridged, surely, but not by the average reader.

(*Letters*, p. 129)

Although Stephens found much to admire in certain American poets, in 'The Old Woman's Money,' he takes a strongly negative view of American novelists, calling them mechanical, superficial and cliché-ridden writers whose fiction appears to be 'an unconscious appeal to the middle-aged woman.' He objects to their formulaic writing in which sex becomes a liaison, and sentimentality is 'a weed growing only in the gardens of the ignorant or the hypocritical.' The remarks continue to strike home if the reader takes into account recent versions of the formula romance consumed by middle-aged American women.

The years 1912-15 constituted a productive writing period for Stephens. He published numerous contributions to journals and newspapers, three novels, a collection of short stories, a chapbook of poems and three other volumes of poetry. *The Crock of Gold* received the Polignac Prize in 1913, a matter of considerable satisfaction to Stephens because he received the award from W. B. Yeats, who had

made slighting remarks about Stephens' poetry a few years earlier. It is probably true that Yeats did not change his mind about the poetry, but he did become an admirer of Stephens' fiction.

Some aspects of Stephens' life were changeless, among them, his fervent patriotism. His devotion to the Irish national cause intensified while he was living in Paris. He wrote to Stephen MacKenna:

I believe in Ireland & in her star, & that she will lift out of this turmoil like a star lifting out of the waves. . . . Ireland is a land of destiny where the gods are brooding their great events . . . Ireland will be the beloved of the world in a way that no nation ever has been.

(*Letters*, p. 143)

He conceived of the idea of writing 'La Comédie Humaine' of Ireland in December 1914, and sought advice from friends on books to read in the areas of Irish history, archaeology, and sociology. In the spring of 1915, he was still pursuing his plan by studying Balzac's method of dealing with numbers of people and events; but his project stopped abruptly in June 1915 when he wrote a depressed note to Thomas Bodkin: 'No one will buy my stuff. The war has flooded over & drowned me. . . . I can't write here & have almost Forgotten that I ever could write' (*Letters*, p. 164).

His election to the position of Registrar of the National Gallery of Ireland on 8 July 1915 was fortunate. It provided him with modest income, stable employment and an occasion to renew his friendships with Irish literary colleagues. It also brought him to Dublin in time for one of the most significant events in modern Irish history, the Easter Rising of 1916.

The Populace Mind: I

There are people upon whom a new fact comes with an almost shattering impact; they give in to it at once, their preconceptions do not withstand the buffet of a new truth. Their one hatred is to be holding the wrong end of the stick, and they are easily made aware and are gratefully repentant when proved in the wrong.

There is another type of mind whose ideas seem to have been born inside them and grow longitudinally with their bones. To these the shock of a new fact is an unpleasant experience: they cannot readjust a focus without discomfort; and if they are in the wrong they are not grateful to the person who proves it. Their philosophy has flowered to the proverb that 'the devil they know is better than the devil they don't know'—a cowardly and slavish populace proverb. Such people are not to be educated in a hurry, for it is impossible to galvanise the minds of those who were mesmerised in childhood by their fathers and mothers, their pastors and masters. They accumulated in extreme youth all the ideas, or devils, for which they had storage, and as they do not know that our education only begins after we have left school, the world is made wicked by their ignorance and dull by their stodginess.

It is a pitiable thing to think that the management of almost all civilised affairs has drifted by sheer latitudinarianism into the hands of this class. To reach the comprehension of such people iteration and reiteration and a constant tattoo of statement and affirmation is necessary, and then at last, when the idea has crystallised into a useless formula, it will beat in beyond their ears, become a part of their bones, and be mesmerised by them into their children long after its usefulness has been exhausted; so that it will be a thorn to those who are trying to do work in the succeeding generations.

This horror is known as the Populace Mind. It sits, to our just amazement, in Council Chambers and Courts of Justice, in pulpits and public-house bars, and its opinions on all subjects are clamant in our newspapers, courts and parliaments. It says of religion that 'you won't go to heaven when you die if you don't wear a collar and

a tie.' In statecraft it says – 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' It prescribes gaol for disease, and ignominy for poverty, and its message to women, uttered with the rotund fullness of complacency, is – why don't you go home and wash socks. I have heard representatives of the populace mind say this, and my amazement was, not so much at the query, as at the fact that the speakers believed they had uttered something fundamental and unanswerable.

Personally, I believe that women should have the vote, or anything else they need, for this reason, that I don't know why they shouldn't; and until I am satisfied of some grave and peculiar disqualification I shall continue to so believe.

There are reasons advanced, but they do not impress me – It is said that women are not capable of government; but the same statement has been made for I don't know how many years against the men of Ireland and against every other oppressed people. But the abilities for government are not so rare or complicated as is imagined. The woman who can conduct a draper's shop or a laundry with success is demonstrating her ability for government. The wife who administers her home with discretion, taking care of her servants and her children, and keeping her household expenditure within the limits of her income, is doing in miniature exactly what Cabinet Ministers are doing on a larger scale. The problems which alarm a state do not differ in kind from those which beset a home. They consist in the management of purely ordinary affairs – how to make both ends meet, and how to provide for the coming year and the coming generation – these are the foundations of both domestic and political economy, and an average mind, reinforced by a penny arithmetic book, can succeed fairly well in either. Let us get away from the idea of a special type of brain being necessary for very ordinary work, and that women cannot succeed where they are daily being successful.

Irish Citizen

1 June 1912

The Populace Mind: II

I would like, however, that sentimentality (which means sham) should be divorced from the women's programme. It is an equality in certain economic and personal directions which is required. Absolute equality is an impossible dream, and would be a hideous reality. There are people who see in the coming of the women the dawn of a new era; an instant and tender radiance will be spread about the most work-a-day affairs, there will be glory in the heavens and the earth, and peace will reign in the market place, the Council Chamber and the home – all if women get the vote. I like and I respect these idealists; in many ways the tone of my mind lifts to them as to friends, but I do not look for any such sensational consummations. I am not able to see woman as the Guardian Angel or the Pure Influence or the Patent Conservator of Virtue. A woman, to my mind, is a female man and a man is a male woman, and each of them is capable (within certain physical limits) of what the other is capable of. I see woman as the helper and comrade of man, one with him at his work and his play, one with him in her appetites and her passions, his equal in eating and drinking, in being born and dying. I would like to get rid of the stained-glass woman: she has looked interesting and played the piano too long and too badly, and her legend has been a disastrous one for her sisters who have had no soft places to pose in, and who have been continually victimised by her mean pretensions.

The world progresses by the activities of both male and female; but the danger and heat of that progress are unequally distributed. On woman falls the woe of generation, and her disabilities while engaged in the supreme act of life-giving have been utilised to disqualify her from being a partaker of life. She has been victimised because she was at work, and has then been asked why she doesn't work?

It is the populace mind, that money-grubbing, impenetrable shell, which is at the bottom of the trouble. It has twisted everything of worth. It would twist Progress if it could, but Progress is

immortal, it is the only thing we know of that is immortal, for it is Life. The world marches on four legs: physical life travels on two called hunger and sex, mental life proceeds on two others – namely, Religion and Statecraft. But hunger has been used to make slaves, and sex to make pets and domestic beasts of burden. They have twisted Religion into theology and debauched Statecraft into politics – and there lies the cause of the muddle which we call civilisation.

There are two great and glorious helpers to life which, if they got anything like adequate scope, could make the world a place of beauty – they are Liberty and Justice. The populace mind has rechristened these friends and made them enemies; they name them now License and Law. In fact, this populace mind is incapable of statecraft or of religion or liberty or justice or anything that is unselfish. Its sole preoccupation is how to guard its property, and amongst its chattels women occupy a costly place. To them a woman is either a household ornament or a more or less pleasant diversion; and in either event they are critical in a leprous fashion. For the household ornament they demand a quaint catalogue of virtues or repressions – they lump these as Beauty and Domesticity. For the other kind they seek more vivid characteristics, and they aggregate these as Beauty and Spirit, and they buy and sell them both. Meanwhile, they hang out flags that were once beautiful, one for each type, under which they say any woman should be happy, and these flags they name Chivalry and Romance – once-splendid words which in their terminology must now be translated as lies and hypocrisy: for this is the chief characteristic of the populace mind, that it is a liar, and that it lies to itself as well as to others.

In our own day you can look closely at its latest lie in the attitude adopted towards the suffrage movement. It was first said that this movement was a disease, then, a little later (for it exists by modification and compromise), they said that it was hysteria. From this they descended by easy stages until at last they called the movement by the ugliest name that has yet been applied to it – the populace mind now calls it ‘politics.’ Further – for the idea has begun to percolate – the populace mind calls the suffrage movement ‘practical politics,’ and as such it is within the very arcana of its comprehension. But the exponents of the populace mind say (and their bearing is magisterially wise), ‘you ladies must not go about fighting for your rights, leave fighting to the lower orders of creation. All wrongs can be redressed by constitutional agitation.’ If

you ask what constitutional agitation is they cannot tell you, for the very sufficient reason that there is no such thing. Constitutional agitation and the Not Far Distant Day are terms which may be translated by the words shuffle and dodge. They, the populace mind, do not know this. They believe easily in these mesmeric terms, but that is no reason why you should.

I say that nothing worth having is ever gotten by constitutional agitation, but only by hostility and bared teeth and battle. It is the law of our existence that we shall fight upwards to what is good; men had to climb not only to their votes, but to the very sanctities of their homes and brains, by a constant and savage warfare with their governors – that is with the populace mind, the embodiment and flower of which is at all times a Government. Always, and for ever, there goes marching a minority chanting the new war which is the progress of the world: always, and for ever, they are howled at and vilified by their populace and their government. The founder of the Christian Religion, the founder of the Mohammedan Religion, Buddha, Confucius, Galileo and Columbus were all at one time in a minority of one, and the bitterness of fools and reactionaries was poured on them until they won. Then indeed they received the adulation of fools which is no better worth receiving than their hostility. If the force of life is in your movement it will swing more and more into war until it wins.

Further, the populace mind say, that your movement is trying to provoke warfare between man and woman. Indeed, they must be saying something, for garrulity is their chief characteristic. There is, and there always has been, antagonism between man and woman, but the name of that warfare is not Suffrage, but Sex, and the intensifying of that conflict makes also for progress. The forces of life swing eternally into battle. It is the matrimony of love and hate, the male and female principles of existence, which makes for progress, and in this matter the women's agitation for human rights has nothing whatever to do. If anything it would patch up that ancient quarrel by establishing for the first time a sex compromise which might make freedom and honesty the basis of civilisation instead of slavery and deceit.

Irish Citizen
8 June 1912

The Populace Mind: III

These people, who are unable to see more than their eyes show them, believe that the physical and natural differentiation of the sexes into male and female relegates woman somehow to a lower plane of existence: they have been taught that one and one make two, and they think that this simple multiplication rule holds good for ever. Further, they are unable to define the terms one and one. In the case of men and women one and one gives a total of one – or perhaps I should say that a half and a half makes one, for man is one half and woman is the other half, and their conjunction is humanity. They point out physical divergences of muscle and function, and do not see that each sex is the complement of the other, framed to a perfect harmony, the one unable to exist without the other. There is at least this fundamental equality between them and the one is as necessary as the other, and the other as necessary as the one.

It is entirely denied by the populace mind that women can make any appeal to reason, and this, notwithstanding the long list of women who in literature, art and science, indeed in war itself, have done notable things. It may be that few of these women have equalled the greatest men in any particular line – it is granted that they have not – but they have a great deal more than excelled the average man and demonstrated that in the arts and crafts where man had reigned alone so long, woman may be a close competitor with him. In this age especially there is an intense female activity in literature, painting and music: in every direction women are drawing abreast, and the reason they have not done so long ago is that they were subjected to most arbitrary educational systems almost every phase of which was framed towards repression instead of freedom. The wonder is, not that women are backwards, but that, in the circumstances, they have any mentality at all. For many centuries they have been taught that a baby and a work basket were all that were necessary to make any woman happy; and so, having artificially retarded, as far as was convenient, the mental development of woman, the populace mind urges that woman cannot

reason and that the only influence they can exert is an emotional one, the implication being that emotion is an inconsiderable aptitude.

Emotion had its place in the human economy long before reason had, and it is not likely that its influence will diminish. Three-quarters of our existence is governed by emotion. The commands of the blood are much more imperative than those of the intellect. Our appetites know an insistency to which our brains are strangers. The highest bliss to which we can attain is gaiety and innocence, and with these brains have as yet very little to do. Indeed, life is emotion, and the entire thought of humanity is occupied in an attempt to analyse this fundamental miracle. All literature is an endeavour, not to develop intellect, but to describe and strengthen our emotional natures. All religions, more or less, give the cold shoulder to thought and are occupied almost entirely by feeling. Philosophy itself is, at the last analysis, morality, which is again the proper direction and control of emotion. If woman did not appeal as directly as possible to the emotional side of man I wonder what she would appeal to. If to his reason, they'd have queer husbands. On the other hand, does any one conceive that men strive to please their mates by an appeal to intellectualisms? There is as much emotion in men as in women, and therefore, that kind of statement, like all other populace statements, means nothing.

But the strengthening and deepening of the intellectual side of women is just as necessary to them as it is to men, and just as easily accomplished. Sex divergences and the modification which must follow all functional differences do not operate to create a nullity but an opposite. Male thought has been set up as the standard of intellect, but male thought can never attain to fruitfulness until it has married its opposite and corrective female thought, and from that union there will be a generation and regeneration. The aim of every mother should be to see that her daughters are as well educated as her sons. The aim of a perfect state would be to insist that its women should be, if anything, better grounded than its men, for with them rests the moulding of the entire human race – male and female – of whom during the most plastic years they have so complete control and guidance that their duties in this regard are of an urgent gravity.

Irish Citizen

15 June 1912

The Populace Mind: IV

An objection which is frequently urged against the woman movement is, that it tends to give women a degree of liberty which nature forbids them to accept, and which, if it should be accepted, might result in a deterioration of the race by withdrawing from the children the maternal guidance and love which is so valuable a factor in growth. It is not too much to claim that the long intercourse between mother and child (which in the human race is prolonged far beyond that of any other genus) has done more than every other circumstance to differentiate man from the beasts. It is to this prolongation of intimacy that I would trace the coming of reason: but to suggest that this companionship and guidance and love would be seriously jeopardised if women had to cross a street in order to register a vote is to make a silly statement. If this were the case, then a visit to a theatre, or a picnic, or a run down town to do one's shopping, should also be regarded as dangerously immoral practices.

On this count the word 'unnatural' is often heard – unnatural women, unnatural wives and unnatural mothers – this is an epithet which the more curiously learned theorists of the populace mind employ against women. It is always necessary, so far as is possible, to define one's terms, and such a sweeping, maledictory expression as 'unnatural' demands analysis. I have never yet heard a satisfactory explanation of this word. Taken at its face value, 'unnatural' means, against nature; but if you pursue this expression you will find that it leads nowhere. To go against nature is not unnatural – it is impossible, it is unthinkable. Nature attends too closely and particularly to her business to allow such a thing to occur. We are born, and eat and sleep and die by the direction of the Mighty Mother. She touches us intimately at a thousand points. We are never out of her bailiwick. She has wrapped us round with her atmosphere. She holds us up on her clay. She feeds us and clothes us and kills us. She moulds and controls us on every side, and never, for the most minute fraction of a breathing point, does that incessant

watch and ward falter. Nothing that a man can do, nothing that a man can think or say is outside of her jurisdiction. All the extremes swing in her hand. Hunger as well as satiety, disease equally with health are her ministers. Life and death are equal with her, and in her eyes madness is as natural as is sanity. The laws which govern disease and crime and madness are as orderly in their evolution as are those obtaining in health and virtue and sanity. The struggle for life of a malignant cancer is as impressively ordered and as logically and fundamentally coherent as is the progression of a healthy seed to an oak tree, or the growth from a shell to an eagle. Disease sends out her pioneers and cohorts to attack life; seizes and subdues and fortifies all that it captures, and protects itself with equal skill and resource against health as does health against it, and the balance is maintained by both combatants being equally victorious.

The person, therefore, who uses the word unnatural is using a term which has no thinkable meaning. Departures from tradition, from the customary and well-worn into experimental fields, these are not unnatural; they are amongst the most certainly rational things in life. They are the laboratory adventures of nature, her search for the path of least resistance. It is such methods which make possible the slender, scarcely perceptible modifications which have resulted in divergences so far apart as a tree, a shell fish and a man.

Time for the furtherance of her plans does not matter much to her who has eternities to work in; but in the settlement of those domestic affairs which, with the gift of reason, nature gave into our keeping, mankind cannot afford to await her periods. If to our emotional and instinctive faculties there has been superadded a reasoning and critical one, these were intended for immediate use. The world cannot wait while nature grinds millenniums in her mills. Our needs and our sorrows are pressing, and anything which tends to mitigate the one or the other should be hailed with joy. Such a mitigation and assuagement, or at least the forerunner and prophecy of it, must be sought for in all movements, and the woman's movement will, therefore, be opposed by the query whether it is progressive, or reactionary and subversive. If the latter, it will die without the aid of any assaults from man: if the former, it will succeed in despite of any assaults.

The heralds of the superman are now heard on every side. Race culture is beginning to mean something more than the crankiness of a crank. The disciples of Mendel, Galton and the Eugenic explorers are preaching their doctrines and conducting their experiments in

every town. If they wish for even the most partial success, they cannot afford to leave woman out of their programme. She is the hub of their universe, the very centre of their systems, and until they better her condition, the children of their hope must remain in the realms of prophecy, the as yet uninhabited Country of the Millennium.

They have an ideal – who has not? The person without an ideal is a person without a soul, for ideals are the crude staff out of which progress is made. Consciously or unconsciously the undertow of life, that trebly submerged stream, flows serenely under the flush of politics and the hustle and babble of the merchant men, directing its course towards a goal that is not the populace-mediocrity goal. Here and there it flashes to our sight; here and there the sound of its flowing is heard; and the woman's movement seems to me one of the signs of its presence, and, however it may be obscured by lack of unity, it is a noble and generous one. Whatever scheme the ages are toiling to, we are all here for its furtherance, and everyone who intensifies life by a single throb, who stamps yesterday a little further from remembrance, and pulls to-morrow one inch closer to comprehension, is doing what the populace call Duty but the philosopher knows as Virtue.

Irish Citizen

22 June 1912

In Shining Armour

The purity crusade which is just now agitating the music-hall (one wonders does it really agitate them?) presents some interesting aspects. It is by no means the first time such a warfare has been conducted against the latter-day gypsies and strollers, and one may safely prophesy that it will not be by any means the last, for the tribes of those who sin for and against morality are eternal. In the long run none of these movements has made the slightest difference to the halls, and they never will; the music-hall mind is as fixed in its

own dusty firmament as the Polar Star or the mind of the music-hall badgerer. For a week or two the shady, if not black, business will be retrenched from the performance; some exuberance will be shorn from the song which means something quite other than it says; the joke will be pink instead of blue; the more elastic movements will be docked from the dance that is not worth dancing, and the drapery will be thicker than is pleasant to either the dancer or those long-suffering but stupid people, the persons danced at. For a little time these things will happen, and then (because purity crusaders have only the lives of butterflies) they will revert to those original sins which are part of their profession – the most conservative profession in the world.

I will not question whether, in the terms of the crusaders, the music-halls are or are not indecent, or, rather, immoral – for this is the word most frequently on the lips of the reformers. It is a grave matter that the term ‘morals’ should have become so closely identified with the term ‘sex’ that many people have a difficulty in disentangling them – its significance is much wider than this. It is a matter for astonishment that so many healthy and sane people should become unhealthy and, indeed, mad as soon as either of these words are uttered. The whole subject is as much pathological as philosophical; but for hundreds of years there has been a number of people (by their noise one might think the major portion of humanity) who cannot discuss morality otherwise than in terms of the rabies. They hate sex: more, they fear it; and one wonders why. There is interesting speculation in this affair, and perhaps some comic matter might be extracted from it also. There is really no fun in the music-halls, but there is plenty of fun in philosophy. If you ever see a person who is laughing when he thinks nobody is looking at him, then you have a philosopher under observation and the joke is possibly cosmic; but you will have to be able to see that joke with your whole being instead of only with your funny-bone, as is the case with common humour.

It would be interesting if some crusader set down, with as much particularity as he can compass, his case against the human figure and the gymnastic exercises which are now called dances. I am sure a case could be made on medical grounds; I would be very glad to hear it. I am equally certain that a case can be made in terms of the larger ethic which some people think is philosophy. It is this latter case I should prefer to have formulated. Sometimes, and I think this is undeniable, a great part of repressive morality has its origin in as

ugly a bog of aggressive, physical jealousy as can well be imagined. I do not particularly wish to hear that aspect of the matter, although, in the interest of public health, it also should be ventilated. About three years ago it was the custom in Ireland that if a policeman failed to show a certain tally of prisoners per month he was liable to be discharged from his employment. They did not, like the Israelites of old, plead an inability to make bricks without straw; no policeman was ever discharged for lack of prisoners; they made themselves the crimes which they subsequently punished, and they extracted a very decent and interesting livelihood from their own sins. The necessity for living is not confined to policemen. There are a number of subjects spoken of to-day under wrappings and disguises and mysteries, but honest discussion would show them to be no more than painted bogies which have been patented and exploited by those whose livelihood depends on the credulity and superstition of man – a numerous class this, also.

If the crusade had been initiated by the medical profession, there would be some hope that its bona fides might be sound: one could then respect it a little with one's mind as well as with one's prejudices or atavistic memories – of course, one would not respect it very much, for the average doctor is as ignorant of anything real as the average nailmaker. I implore somebody to state me the case of morality versus sex in its application to the higher ethic, and I beg that complaisant person not to give me facts or exact information. I dislike and despise exact information outside of its proper place, which is a Blue-book. I hate the ill-made mind that tells me facts – I have no use for them; no discussion is possible with these weighted dice of thought. The matter must be brought at least one storey above the dissecting-room and vestry. Further, I will forbid such a person, on pain of my contempt, to use the phrase '*A place to which you cannot bring your wife or sister.*' There is no such place on this round earth, and, moreover, your wives and sisters are already laughing at you because they know more about these places by instinct than you ever teach them. All women were music-hall performers in their previous incarnations – so!

But there is a crusade which might profitably be led against music-hall entertainers. God help them! they usually speak of themselves as 'artists,' and the intellectual snobbishness shown by the word is a most valuable sign of their ultimate redemption. I assert that most music-hall and theatrical performances are inane, tedious vulgarities, and are, therefore, and for no other reason,

debasement. If these were even the vulgarities of their own time I would prefer no complaint against them, because they would then be in their proper evolutionary position; but their miserable rubbish, reflects always the mental attitude of twenty or even fifty years ago; it is only brought up to date by 'gag,' by mentioning some such word as aeroplane or Tariff Reform; I say, and this is the real case against the music-halls, that no man over thirty years of age would go into a music-hall unless his head was empty to desperation, and that he goes there only in preference to committing suicide. I would, having seen the work of any comedian for three minutes, prophesy every gesture that he could make in any song that he would ever sing during the remainder of his life. Like the people of the Hebrides who existed by taking in each other's washing, music-hall performers exist by stealing each other's tricks. There are about twenty gestures only on the music-hall, and the person who can watch the eternal, wearisome recurrence of these stereotyped funninesses deserves all the boredom he is going to get.

If the public went on strike against the badness of the performance, if they led a host against the stage door demanding honest laughter for honest money, there would be some hope for them; but in reality the music-hall audience is composed entirely of people who ought to be on the music-hall stage, and they have not got among them a single moral that you could damage with a hammer.

Saturday Review

22 November 1913

Come Off That Fence!

In a movement whose objective is to change things as they are into things as they ought to be, it is necessary to be certain of two facts – First: What you are going to do; second: Who you are going to fight; for this is certain that you can do nothing without fighting something. The entire machinery of life and health has been captured by your enemies and they dole out existence to you with as

miserly a hand as they dare. You will never get from these traitors to humanity more than a quarter of what you demand: anything over that you must take for yourselves, and you will find that ancient and modern privilege will fight like demons to keep you from the enjoyment of physical, mental or spiritual freedom. Do not forget that to-day the Church is as commercial in its organisation as any limited liability company of this city.

As to what you are going to do, it can be stated in the smallest space. By bettering your own conditions you are going to better the conditions of everyone. Every great human movement, every crusade that had an idea or an ideal for its banner was inaugurated and carried to victory by your class in the teeth of precisely the same opposition as is arrayed against you to-day. And this is equally true, that when your victories had been won the rich people, the glib-tongued professional classes, and that other class which croaks for ever on the fence, have sneaked in and stolen the jobs and turned the idealism which was won by your bones and your groans into a new tyranny for yourselves and your children. It is good to remember this and to be prepared for it.

The world-movement, in which you are now pioneers, has this happy difference from all others that the idealism has a prudent alloy of materialism to keep it in ballast. Be certain that this is true; that before you can assist others in the slightest degree you must assist yourselves. Only from your own prosperity can there come any assuagement for the miseries of your class or of humanity.

Be very proud of what you are doing. The whole weary earth is hanging on your fortitude. You are as truly the liberators of the world to-day as were those twelve other workingmen who long ago threw up their jobs to follow the penniless Son of the Carpenter, and your battle will not be a bit easier than theirs was. Your leader was in jail through as contemptible a piece of political and social treachery as can be imagined. Every lie that malignity could invent has been used against him for the past seven years. Are you going to desert him? He did not desert you. Was it any fun for Larkin to be rusting in Mountjoy Jail? If he could have been bought his price would have been paid ages ago; but thank heaven, there are still poor men who are not for sale. Can you be bought away from him? If so, there is money and [****] soup for the traitor; but one can live to the height of one's intellect and soul and be a proud man even if one is a hungry man.

Travel light; there is no room in your knapsacks for anything but

war munition. Philosophy and theology, such as you are used to, will not run very far away from you. Do not be afraid that they will vanish, because you have left them alone for a while; they do not vanish. Look for them on the nearest fence; there they sit piping their eye on this side and the other; they will come down if you drop a penny or as soon as a job is visible.

Who are you going to fight? Capitalism? It is a beast with ten thousand heads, the legs of a centipede and the arms of an octopus. Its heads are able to speak at once from the boss' office, the Press and the pulpit. Its legs are soldiers and sailors, policemen and renegades of your own class, and its arms are halfpennies and pennies and pounds. Go for it surely, go for it quickly, but tread very warily or those legs and arms and teeth will get you and bite and crush like the devil that it is.

Beware of all newspapers but your own, those you found and write yourselves. Beware of them, especially when they seem to be on your side; that means you are engaged in something which they see will be to your disadvantage. Throw up your programme as soon as it is approved of by the Press, it must be a bad programme for you because the Press is owned body and soul. Every newspaperman from the editor to the envelope-licker is a slave, they are owned by the advertisers not by the readers.

Tell the clergy to come down off that fence, and if it is necessary, pull them down. It is as necessary for their own good as it is for yours that they should be honest. Teach them that their business is not Mammon, but God. Time and again the Church has to be reminded of that elementary fact; they forget their origin, and then the Church becomes the most debased and debasing lie under the wide heavens. In Ireland today the Church is a lie. The attitude of the clergy throughout this dispute has been cynical and disgusting to the last degree. If they dared they would have ordered you back to your masters; they are so used to ordering in Ireland that the difference between a priest and a policeman is too slight to talk about. They did not dare order you back this time, so they sat on the fence. Not a word came from them (or from your Members of Parliament) as to the merits or demerits of your case. Not a single effort have they made to settle this case on an equitable basis, but, none the less, their opportunity came, they were able to leap into the ring without even coming off the fence (a piece of truly admirable gymnastic). They have been able to advertise themselves as the Saviours of Ireland's Children, through a piece of machine-made,

theatrical sentimentality which would be laughable if it were not revolting, and, through it all, they have not said a word which could injure their influence with either party, but the blow was aimed at labour. Tell them to come off that fence. Tell them that although Ireland has more priests and policemen than any other country in the world, it is still the worst in education, in art, and in the art of living; that in Ireland wages are low and living is high; that humanity is rotting under their care; that intellect is stagnant; that dirt is the rule instead of the exception; that men are housed like pigs, and are fed worse than pigs, and are educated not at all in our so-Christian land. We will learn that they are making us pay too high a price for the privilege of being called the Isle of Saints. If they do not come off the fence and do their duty the clergy must be added to the number of those you have to fight. It is well to remember that if you say anything about them they will go to your employers behind your backs and get you dismissed if they can. Watch well that those who have spoken and fought for you are not being persecuted by bad priests, for, without the gift of prophesy, one can foretell that this is going to happen.

Irish Worker

13 December 1913

Going to Work

School was only yesterday, and yet it was finished for ever. The little world of green fields, of wide walls covered with maps, of well-thumbed, dog's-eared books, of all kinds of friendships, jealousies, and competitions had already faded so distantly that it seemed faint as a dream.

About him now were wide, long streets, and all the bustle and movement of a strange world. Outside, cars with their eager drivers were spanking past; there were cabs and trams, lorries and bicycles—a very whirlpool of movement, which seemed to have neither direction nor purpose. They came from all sides, and they

went away from every side without as much as a look at him. The footpaths were equally thronged. So many different people, and all grown up! Only now and again were boys to be seen. The world had suddenly become moustached and grave, and yesterday a moustache was the badge of age! It seemed that the world was full of people who had moustaches and spectacles. Yesterday a person who wore spectacles was called 'Old Four-Eyes.' It meant a silly person, an incompetent, at whom one flung snowballs or clods in their season, and whom one held at a distance always.

A fat man was waddling along the road, but no person looked at or made fun of him. A woman fought with her umbrella, which had become twisted among parcels – not a living soul laughed at her! A driver had just set down his fare, and, climbing to his seat again, he slipped on the greasy wheel and fell, but nobody shouted the funny things which were customary.

These matters would have been enough to make one die of laughing yesterday, but yesterday was undoubtedly dead, and today was a world in which he had no part. Things had always centred about him before. Lessons, fights, games, all had swung in his immediacy, not alone within focus, but actually within reach of his hand, and here, suddenly, he was out of focus and out of touch. There were happenings on every side, which had nothing to do with him. None of the drivers of these cabs and cars looked to him for approbation or assistance. Not a tram-man suggested that he should do anything for him. The very cyclists kept their eyes for themselves as they whizzed steadily past. No one stopped even for a minute to ask him a question, or to say – 'It's a nice day!' or 'That's a fine building over yonder!' Nobody said a word. They went here and there, and if he did not get out of their way, they got out of his without so much as looking at him.

He was lonely, it is true, but he was not unhappy. A curious person has no time to be miserable, and he was very curious. There were such multitudes of things to look at and listen to – the never-ceasing stream of people who came towards him on the pavement, and the hurrying swarm of those who caught up, passed, and disappeared every moment. Where did they come from, and to what places were they going? They appeared before him, vital and human, for one brief moment, and then they disappeared. Had he nothing to do with them? Was there no point of contact between himself and these hurrying strangers? Were they hastening utterly out of his sight, or would they return to-morrow or the next day to

clap him on the shoulder and say – ‘You and I must know each other well: we will walk together and tell our secrets to each other and be friends’; for, without knowledge, he knew that people must be friends, and that no other life than that of friendship is possible.

He had these feelings, but not these thoughts, and even the feelings were not verifiable because the sun was shining, and the bustle and movement of the world forbade any exercise other than those of eyes and ears, but somewhere, without effort and without cognizance, he was recording and storing away impressions and intricacies, raw stuffs of every kind, which his mind would digest later on when it got a little time to itself.

Meanwhile, there was something to be done which did not admit of loitering. He looked again at the paper in his hand: it was crumpled and dirty, but he clung to it as to an anchor. The pencilled address on it was almost indecipherable, but, although he knew it by heart, he read it again with the same care as at first. At the end of each street he had asked some hurrying stranger ‘Did he know the way to——Street?’ and they had all given him a complicated direction, of which he could remember nothing but the first turning. He halted again and asked one of those flying nobodies, and the stranger replied without looking at him – ‘You are almost beside it,’ said he; ‘it is the second turn on the right,’ and the stranger melted away as all the others had done.

He paced on. All kinds of thoughts were in his mind. Perhaps that man did not really know where the street was. He might have answered only to get rid of him, or he might have thought, honestly enough, that he was giving the proper direction and yet was mistaken, for in a place of the hugeness of this city one might easily be mistaken. There were streets everywhere, and off each street other streets branched endlessly. It did not seem possible that one could know with such readiness where any particular place was in such a congeries of streets: furthermore, he had a feeling that the place for which he was seeking could not be so easily discovered as the man’s remark implied. It was only one street off! Can one reach a place of wonder and terror in half-an-hour’s easy walking? One should take ship and fight through savage forests and naked enemies to come to any place worth winning to.

At the end of this street also he halted, and, although his heart began to beat painfully, yet he was chilled. There was a question of emptiness at the pit of his stomach. He felt that now he had come so near to the end he would be glad not to search any further. The end

was too definite, too immediate. Half-an-hour was not sufficient time to make one accustomed to any consummation. He might have turned and walked away again, but there was no place to go to. He would not be allowed back to school, and his parents were away in England – he walked on.

At the next turning he halted again, and asked another man where——Street was?

The man looked at him.

‘This is it,’ said he calmly. He raised his hand slightly and pointed, ‘There it is,’ said he, and he also went quickly away.

He was standing by the very street. Six paces more and he was standing in it. It was a narrow place. Two lines of high houses frowned over a long strip of road. The road was dotted here and there with a few cars, and there were perhaps half-a-dozen people walking in it. It was very silent.

He walked down the street consulting his crumpled piece of paper, and at a certain house he halted. Then he put the scrap of paper in his pocket, and knocked very gently on the door.

The Nation

3 January 1914

An Essay in Cubes

It must have occurred to many readers that our novelists are peculiarly heartless people: they have no bowels of compassion, or, at least, they have only an appendix of compassion. I do not mean that they brutally outrage their readers’ sensibilities – there might be a virtue in that, or an honesty to leaven our repugnance with respect – but the horrid self-revelation of many writers, masked as it is by the current fashion in ethic and religion, is quite unconscious, and should hold many of them to the scorn of their readers if their readers knew how to read.

To know how to read is to be critical, but it is singular how few have learned to read between the lines, or under the words which have been written. In every book there are two stories – one is the

tale which has been written for the reader, the other is the story which the writer has not been able to keep out of his pages, and which, even in his own despite, will be the truer history of the two, and ought to be the more interesting part of any book.

On looking at a picture one may say: this is the picture of a field; and, having said so, may suppose that justice has been rendered to both the picture and the painter; but the person who has seen only the presentation of a field has seen the least part of the representation – the thing to be looked for in any picture is the painter; and the personality behind a story, a poem, or a piece of music will be the only really interesting thing to a critic.

The fact that there have been so few true readers is responsible for the further fact that a great number of those who have engaged, with credit and fortune, in the arts have had few qualifications to be listened to, for the evidence of their personalities as portrayed by their brushes or their pens show them to be immature human beings.

We can examine the psychology of a writer easier than we can that of any other man. His coin is words, his currency is in every man's pocket, and can be rung on every man's counter. In his work is unconsciously precipitated the content of his mind, and from it can be gathered the tone of his civilisation and the stage of his growth as a human creature; but no man's mental coin or paper is ever questioned in fiction, and our very habitude of words has left us curiously ignorant of their weight. Judged as human beings, or as intelligences, the greater number of those writers who are named 'masters' will be found to be very unmasterly persons indeed, and, saving a certain technical excellence, both they and their works are owed only the scantiest reverence.

It is matter for astonishment how mediocre is the intellect which the best of these writers will display. The masters of fiction have seldom risen above the level of an after-dinner speaker who has ascertained his own glibness and the silliness of people who have dined, and who knows that it is seldom necessary to give of his best, even if he had it. The thought of these men does not often rise above banality: from them you will get no winged words; they will not show you the other side of the moon, but they will show you and tell you everything you have already seen and heard, and they do this with the rarest possible agility.

A notable example of the after-dinner writer who has attained to fame is Fielding. The unceasing worldly-wise chatter of that author

is loathsome to me; he will say (pleasantly, I admit) what every other after-dinner speaker would have said upon the same incentive: the tone of his conversation never departs from the walnuts and the wine, and it is nightly paralleled by any barrister or doctor whose tongue is loosened by the easiness of his companions and the adequacy of his food. The fact that Gibbon considered him so monumental a personality is sufficient to render Gibbon suspect also, and Gibbon is suspect upon precisely the same grounds as Fielding is – they are both glorified mediocrities.

One thing you may get from them – it is humour; and, in this contact, humour may be defined as the last refuge of the intellectually destitute: it has been used to cover every sin of stupidity and vice which the world has known. The idea that a witty man must be intelligent is not true, for the witty mind is the most banal thing that exists. Much of the wit to be found in books is no more than a technical device which can be learned in a few lessons by any person willing to undergo the labour of 'getting up' three or four formulae and of practising these diligently for a week. The art which has lasted has never been witty; the books which have lasted are not humorous in the accepted sense; the songs which time and the unconscious selection of our forefathers have sanctified for us are not comic. Indeed, many writers do not know that humour is anything other than the formula which they have discovered or copied; but although humour can so easily be counterfeited, it is not at all the linguistic accomplishment which so many people consider it. It is a tone of mind, and unless a man's humour be different from every other man's, then it is counterfeit. But in fiction, as in our music-halls, humour has been standardised, and is now the most vulgar part of our public equipment.

Humour is popular because it flatters the vanity of the least intelligent section of society; it makes them think that they are thinking, and, than this, there is no delusion more dear to the heart of a fool. At the root of popular humour is an intellectual snobbishness which thinks that in seeing a joke it has performed an exceedingly complicated mental action, it has squared some circle; but every music-hall performer knows that if his jokes depart from drunkenness and sexuality, they will no longer be intelligent to his clients – the reason being that in drunkenness and sexuality any fool is as wise as any philosopher. The writers of fiction have this knowledge also, and that is why they are humorous.

A book may be bathed in humour, but it may not drip of it, and

too many of our writings are heavy with this mentally indigestible condiment. At the last, humour is intelligence, and intelligence is religion, and religion is self-consciousness.

Just as many artists are no more than animated photograph-machines which project rigorously the inessentials of something seen but not visualised, so many writers have been phonographs, and they have authoritatively reproduced the most banal ideal of their day floating in a solution of the then-current scientific small-talk. A writer may be judged by the variety of his matter and by the subjects he makes his characters talk about. In nearly every instance they speak of matters which are too volatile for the solid permanency of print. They may have considered that they were justified in doing this because the very ordinary people they portrayed spoke about very ordinary things, and they may claim that their business is to portray life as they see it and hear it. If they make this defence, they must accept the description of phonographs instead of intelligences; their duty is to see the external world not with their eyes but with their minds, and to pass it through that crucible before they reproject it; but if they are unable to digest their vision, we are entitled to inquire why they remain in an intelligent profession. They were interested in these ordinary people only because they were incapable of being interested in anything better. 'As our aspiration, so is our inspiration' and the vulgarities of a book are always the vulgarities of its author. There never is an exception to this rule. We reproduce ourselves: our characters live and move on our own mental plane solely; they are our brothers and sisters, not in consanguinity, but in the deepest sense that any relation is possible to living creatures. Every book written is the creation of incest.

The most valuable critical remark I have ever heard was said to me by A.E. thus: All true poetry has been written on the Mount of Transfiguration – (poetry is the base of and contains every other art). The only subject in which a competent writer should engage is one showing the growth of a soul to some maturity; the subject chosen by almost all novelists has been the progress of some male or female person towards matrimony. They have never heard of the Mount of Transfiguration; and if they had heard of it, they might not have understood what it meant. Their whole conception of life is physical, and when they try to look upwards, which is inwards, they cannot see heaven because of the red haze in their brains; still, they are brothers to the wolf and the vulture, and their minds, like the dens of those others, are filled with gnawed bones. Blood is implicit

in their pages. How this person strangled or shot or stabbed that person in order to couch himself beside some perfectly unimportant female! – it is their theme; and in their pages also the scientist, if he wishes, may search for the beetle and the bat.

Ultimately the novelists are the critics, and if they understood their own business there would be nothing to urge against them in the dual capacity. They have judged one another's work, and out of their massed judgments a standard of value has been erected which is the present classical novel; but the classical novel has not been good enough to take rank seriously as a work of art: the slovenliness of expression and the mediocrity of thought has been concealed under the veil of a humour which has to cover a greater multitude of sins than even charity can. It is their real sin that the novelists have seldom been artists; few, indeed, have tried to shape their work with the loving patience which a good painter would give to his picture. We are invited to admire their six thousand words per day, but we will refuse to do so. They do not understand the artistic value of words because they do not often read poetry. They seem to fancy that an adequate statement of a fact or event is all that is required of them in the way of art, and so they write in order that those who run may read. Mere practice in writing will give to the average person this facility, but it will not give anybody a style, and style itself will not redeem a writer from the condemnation of a philosophic critic who demands an heroic soul in addition to the facile drums and trumpets.

The term objective, as applied to art, has only a temporary significance, if it has any. It is too usually considered that an artist is one who projects himself into external phenomena, and transcribes it. I am more inclined to believe that there is no such thing as objective writing in fiction, but in science there has been much, and it has paralysed science for centuries. The average scientific writers in every age have been the least scientific intelligences then living in the world. We will have no belief in scientists until we are assured that they are deeply read in poetry and are as deeply interested in the sacred books of the world; then we will know that they are really pursuing their *metier*, for poetry and the sacred literature are the record of human progress. However curiously a scientist may regard a beetle, he can never record more than the catalogue of its physique and the menu of its nourishment; if the beetle is ever to be discovered, it will be found inside of the scientist, and not outside of

him. Progress is not towards a goal, but towards an experience, and there is no physical experience possible to a person over twenty-five years of age; after that term every experience must be mental. Humanity has not experienced anything for over one thousand years; humanity is not yet twenty-five years of age, and until women drink of their own breasts there will be no progress. Objective art – realism as it is usually known – has to be a failure, but I do not think there has been any. Man is a microcosm of the macrocosm; he contains or reflects all things, and the more he is a conscious being, the more clearly will he describe the gods or cave-men who are suspended in his own personality, but few writers of fiction have had the clear mental insight which justifies the title of ‘great’. There is but one science in the world; it is psychology, and psychology can only be attempted by a fully-conscious being. One should not write a book for other people; there are no other people. A book should be written to clarify the mind of its writer and to prepare food for genius.

Many of our best writers have been incompletely developed people, or, rather, people who had only developed along one side of their nature. There are the writers whose outlook on existence is purely intellectual. Their novels are monstrous distortions of life; they see everything in terms of a logic which has no existence in fact, the plan of their books is mathematic (in the vulgarest sense), and the action of their puppets is developed like a problem in chess. These men make plots, and often very interesting ones, but their work has as little relation to life as has the sum in algebra which has been posed for a class of schoolboys.

Further, they are intellectual parvenus, and their work is too often vitiated by the extraordinary cold cruelty of the newly-wise. They write with their teeth and their claws; their aim is punishment; they demand and supply pursuing fates and furies; for Nemesis only do their altars smoke, and one imagines them squatting over their pens with the same old glee with which a torturer of old might have gloated upon his brazier or his thumbscrews. George Meredith does not belong entirely to this section, but, at times, the cruelty of his mind, as displayed by the treatment of his creations, is shocking, is hideous. He harried and tormented his *Egoist* more savagely than any savage deity could have done; he treated him as no decent man would treat another human creature; he never ‘let up’ on him once. So, too he hounded Richmond Roy through every kind of indignity into paralysis and death; he hunted many another of his poor devils

with the same unremitting savagery, and he hid these crimes under a sparkle of humour exactly as every other writer of his terrible tribe has done.

Cruelty as an element in life is legitimate subject-matter for an artist, but the artist must not be guilty of it himself; the abominations pictured by Degas give honour to that artist; they are his terrible protest against the real villainies of existence, but the history of the Egoist is a fearful, unconscious self-revelation on the part of its author. In so far it is of interest to the critic; it will illumine for him many singular intellectual atrocities which are to-day as cruel as Degas's soldiers were some years ago; he may find in himself the mind that invented the Egoist and the hand that fashioned Beardsley's drawings, and when he has discovered himself he will be at peace for ever; but poor humanity may shudder to learn that its prophets are thus beaked and taloned.

Mr Hardy has written cruelly also, but the cruelty is not in his mind, it is in his conception of life; and even in *Jude the Obscure*, that miserable book, one feels that he has stated a case which is as painful to himself as it can be to his readers. As an artist he is much better than Meredith, as a man lacking in mental courage. This perpetual, unworthy complaint against life will deny to any writer the title of 'great,' and will further deny him the title of poet. No poet was ever cruel or timorous in his mind. Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, they depicted cruelty and timidity, but were dissociate from those; they took the reptiles from their dens and hung them against the eye of day, singing with all their power their great affirmations.

In the novels of Meredith, Hardy, and Mr George Moore, the curious reader may trace a sufficiently curious psychology. For many reasons Mr Moore ought to have been the greatest writer of his contemporaries. He was a freer man; he was more self-conscious than the others, and, therefore, more open to the incitement of every kind of experience, but he had the misfortune to be born too soon. A very fine writer was spoiled by the fact that he was not born twenty years later. He came into a world entirely dominated by Charles Darwin and the theories of his time: a world absolutely reeking of the most matter-of-fact intellectualities, and he could no more escape from this environment than Meredith or Hardy could escape from the same stony preoccupations. None of these writers had the free minds of artists. The constant engagement of every artist is to dodge his own atmosphere: environment, which is everything to the historian and biographer, is poisoned air for an imaginative writer:

imagination is in effect the escape from environment. How Mr Moore bound himself down to the writing of novels like *Esther Waters* and *Evelyn Innes* is a miracle which one must continually deplore. His *Mummer's Wife* is probably the finest novel in English, but in *Ave* it seems to me he has only recently discovered how he would have written if Darwin had never been born. He has written some other person's masterpieces, and it is now too late to believe that he will ever write his own. Even so, the critical reader may gather from his books the record of a very curious personality.

There are those others whose intellectual being is rudimentary, but whose emotional faculty is in command. These are no less interesting than the others; and although every greasy crime of sentimentality and foolishness is to be discovered in their pages, one can lay to their credit quite as many virtues as the intellectuals can claim. Those who write with their heads only are cold, selfish, and opinionated: these ills cannot be cured; those who write from their emotional centres are only ignorant, and ignorance is a disease which can be remedied to some degree. 'If the fool,' said Blake, 'would persist in his folly, he would become wise.' The positive virtue of the emotional writers is that, while they seldom attain the technique of their more learned brothers, they do represent life more truly. It is singular how consistently they are on the side of the angels: ignorance always is until it has been debauched by intellect, and, afterwards, when the intellect ripens into intelligence, it ranges itself again on the side which ignorance had already voted for. Emotion, even while it is most larded with folly, is very wise; its trouble is that it is not conscious; and until it is conscious, its own wisdom is obscured from it. Dostoyevski is an emotional writer, and, although few great novelists have sunk to his pits of banality, none have risen to the heights which he has attained. Scott, Dumas, Dickens are emotional writers, but no intellect ever bathed itself in such deep and limpid springs. With more intelligence all these men would have been great novelists, but none of them have any style worth speaking of, and seldom can one detach from their writings a reflection which may be generally applied as we can apply the maxims of Blake or Nietzsche, in whom emotion and intellect almost balance each other – which is to say that these two writers are artists.

It is the distinguishing mark of a great writer that both portions of his nature be developed: he must be a whole and single being, and he must think and write with his whole being. Success depends on

the variety of one's inner life; a rich nature will give richly; a poor nature will be a man of one book, even though his personal experience be as varied as that of a musical comedy actress. Sterne was a man of poor nature; he gave of his best once. Borrow was more richly endowed than perhaps any other English fictionist (his fact and fable are seldom divorced); he gave abundantly, but, as he always felt more deeply than he thought, he gains a crown, but no sceptre; the same, in converse, is true of Samuel Butler and Mr Shaw.

For these reasons no person should write biography but a competent critic, and he should refuse to avail himself of letters from or anecdotes about the person he is celebrating. His psychological analysis should be entirely based on the published works, the pictures, or the music of his subject; and his aim should be to release from the stories the character which is entangled in every page of them. The majority of people who write letters word them placatingly, almost as though they were seeking to mollify a possible enemy. The letters of many authors are composed of useless flattery or of matters which are important in the very meagerest sense: they are no index to the ego; he is in his books, and we may pluck him therefrom as we pluck ripe fruit from a bush. A singular mixture he may be found when thus collected; a mess of lies and truths and half-truth; a mass of braveries and timidities, vanities and self-deceptions and sterling nobilities, often, to the casual gaze, a mountebank or a mediocrity, but, thereupon, the critic may set to and discover for us the buried titan. He need not recount for us the sins of his subject; we have committed them all ourselves, and sin now bores us. A man is the sum of his own goodness, and the residue of him is atavistic; therefore, whatever of magnanimity, of courage, of curious thought the critic can discover, these he may write for us in a good round hand. He should recollect that he is not celebrating a man, but a soul. We cannot be instructed at all about men: they are obvious; they are visible to the naked eye; but the best of us know very little about a soul, even when it is our own, and that is the quest of the critic.

The great novelist will for ever be less than the great critic. The novelist is the food-carrier to genius; the genius is the critic, and the critic, when he is truly competent, is the great poet. There has not lived one yet in the known history of man.

In reading verse, one should not seek all the time for verbal felicities; one should look for a little poetry, remembering that one

can only take of anything exactly as much as one already has of that thing. We collect nothing; we fortify ourselves, and so become conscious. From our parents we may get physique, but no child resembles its parents in their mental or spiritual peculiarities. What has become of the children of Shakespeare, Milton, and the thousand lively emperors or bandits who went before and came after them? They have disappeared in public, but not private, obscurity. There are no parents and no children; that succession is only a political necessity in Nature's republic; we are the elder and younger brothers and sisters of each other, but when we have become conscious beings, we will inquire about our pedigree, and will be told that which we were never ignorant of. But ignorance has its positive, if temporary, side, and it is unpleasant; for when ignorance goes to school, the master gets whipped. Ignorance and wisdom are both states of being which embrace completely their own time. We can be wise or foolish only in community, so Europe is getting ready to think—she has ordered more guns; and Asia is awakening also, for she has discovered that the sun rises in the west.

In regard to fiction, the word 'genius' has been so constantly misapplied that it is time some protest was made. There has not been any genius in fiction; more, in the entire range of English prose and verse there is only one name with which I would couple the unique word as it is intended in this context. At his best (five pages, perhaps) Wordsworth was probably the highest product of English poetry, but he was not a genius; Shakespeare also, in despite of the multiplicity of his engagements, the ferment of his intellectual and emotional life, was not a genius. The only definition of the word which I can give is Blake's half-definition that 'the crooked roads are the roads of genius.' Shakespeare trod no crooked paths; there is scarcely (excepting archaicisms) a line of his which could puzzle a schoolboy or even an actor, although the latter does beg to be nonplussed; his theme is always the experience of average humanity: his appetites, the passions, these are his domain, and in it he rules imperially; but on mental life he seldom touched except in a few light epigrams or the aphoristic generalisation of ideas which had been current for generations before him. The only man who trod the crooked paths was Blake himself, and the critic who can garner Blake from his works will present his readers to the most astonishing personality in the wide range of English literature.

I make no mountainous claim for Blake as a poet, much as I love him, but he is still (as Fuseli said of him long ago) very good to steal

from; and let it be conceded that theft is the first duty of man. The tone of his mind was too metaphysical for the poetic freedom; he did not entirely escape the petrifications of intellect, although he nearly did; yet there are few poets who are better worth reading and few men whom one will love and respect more than he. If he was not a great poet, he was nearly a great man. There was life in that mind, and he was tortured as much in his being as in his verse; his verse is as crooked as his paths; his life was crooked; his whole being had a divine twist in it, and fame was curved away from him always. I think Mr Chesterton once said that Blake was mad, and for that statement, if he did make it, dire and desperate pains are due to Mr Chesterton.

Let it be understood that genius will not make any man a great poet or a great artist, for genius is not God; it will only make him different from every other poet and artist, but that difference will go to the bone and the soul, and with that difference genius has done all that it is able to do. Genius is really an evolutionary step, but, alas! Blake's marriage was unfertile, and his books are not read; there is always a wind to blow out a light, and humanity does appear to have lost its last box of matches – which is a silly thing to say, thank God!

English Review
April 1914

The Old Woman's Money

At some time every writer grows curious as to literary happenings in lands beyond his own, and he sets away on the grand tour. His first harborage is probably France, for the rumour of that country has been in his ears since he freed them of a nurse's chatter. Next will come Russia, a land of which school-boy psychologists will never cease to prattle, and then Germany will demand his attention and bore him. And so, having hinged the knee at many foreign shrines, he will return homeward, marvelling that in all the world there is nothing to be read.

In this perplexity he will remember that there is only one foreign land left in the world, and recalling the fine promise of Emerson, Whitman, Lowell, and several others, he may adventure in the direction of the United States of America. There he will be confronted with the angriest of his disappointments. Other literatures may disgust him or leave him cold, but the writings of America will make him angry: he will get there the cinematograph without its comfortable silence, and he will hear baby language shouted through a megaphone. He will discover that the fine promise has not been performed, and he will wonder what horrid circumstances have conspired to change that of fifty years ago into this of to-day. Perhaps, after revolving the matter he will counsel American writers to get rid of the old woman as speedily as they can, and to put the boy back to discipline for a few years more. If his remarks are harsh, it may be that he divines a proud future for America despite the fact that the old woman and the boy have allied themselves against the genius of their country.

The sole means by which a stranger can satisfy his curiosity about foreign lands is through literature. Writers are the unofficial historians of their own country, and from their pages a national psychology emerges, sharp and clear if the writers are competent, obscure and blotchy if they have not learned their craft. Are Americans quite as hypocritical, sentimental, greedy, and foolish as their writers proclaim? It is a subject on which the American people themselves must pronounce judgment, but in the psychology which has been projected for foreign study these ugly vices overshadow whatever of virtue is limned beside.

This is directly the fault of the writers. That there are many virtues in American life no person can doubt who has read even a little of her history. That there is a real idealism growing strongly in company with, and despite an equally real materialism, is also true, and that these salient points do not adequately emerge from her literature is true also. American writers have not learned how to write; their thoughts are superficial, they have no critical intelligence, and they have the sad courage of all these disabilities. Just as the capitalist seeks a short cut to wealth, the novelist seeks a short cut to art. There may be an easy road to both for those specially endowed people who are millionaires or artists by the grace of God, but for other people both art and business must be learned from their foundations upward. The writers of America, following English mediocrity, have learned the mechanism of the novel fairly

well: their trouble is that while they can all tell a story, none of them can write one, and they believe that construction is the whole art of story-telling! It is an important part truly, but it is not the most important. The secret of good writing is to be found in the words used by the writer and the way he uses these words; but before any American writer I know of can escape from mediocrity he or she must jettison his present vocabulary and provide himself with a new one. I have read no American author recently whose work was not solid with *clichés*, and even when these are not verbal, they are mental; they are implied if they are not expressed. This last sentence, for the benefit of the uninitiated, is a *cliché*.

There is an uglier vice than this: it seems that much of American fiction is an unconscious appeal to the middle-aged woman. Its literature has become brutally feminine. Instead of being sensuous it is sensual, and often indelicately so. After hunger, there is no subject in which an artist or a philosopher might more fruitfully interest himself than the sexual relations of humanity, but the philosophers have avoided it as completely as they could, and the writers, intent on construction, have expressed sex as a liaison, and compressed it to a formula which is very easy to handle. This formula is called 'the literary triangle', and is composed of two women and one man or two men and one woman; but it does not say the last word on sex, it does not even say the first. The sex mystery, all the reactions of which are mental, is not to be settled by this pill, nor is it to be arranged by treating sex as sexuality. That grease is thick on American literature, and it would not be so unpleasant if it were expressed less sentimentally; and sentimentality is a weed growing only in the gardens of the ignorant or the hypocritical.

If one were asked what is the dominant tone in American literature and life, the answer would be 'youthfulness'; but this youth has attained to all the vices of age, and has conserved few of the charms proper to its period. It is a very disingenuous youth indeed. This insistence on 'boyishness' is unhealthy; more, it is depraved. These boyish and the girlish girls of the writer and the artist are the indications of a real cancer in American public life. Perhaps in portraying them the writers and illustrators are describing their environment, and are exposing something which is as true as it is detestable. The cult of youthfulness in America is a national calamity far graver than anything for which Europe has to mourn. Youth has nothing to give life but its energy; it has even less to give literature, for literature is an expression of the spiritual truth

which runs parallel with every material experience. It is not the retailing of petty gossip about petty people; and when this youthful energy is divorced from the control of maturity, nobody can benefit from it excepting that middle-aged woman for whom American literature is now being written.

It may also be that the fault does not lie so much in the writers as in the country. America, perhaps, is not in a position to make or to receive literature. It has not yet had the leisure to evolve a social order, to conserve its traditions, and form a life habitual to itself, and against the background of which every facet of the national existence may be judged. Without a social order there can be no literature: for that the house must be in order. For literature is something more than art; it is the expression of philosophy in art, and it is at once the portrayal of an individual and a racial psychology. A writer is not one who portrays life; he is one who digests life, and every book of his is a lecture on the state of his mental health: he should be careful, then, how he babbles.

American writers must discover or create a vocabulary which is not a jumble of worn-out phrases; they must ruthlessly cut out the boyish boy and the girlish girl, and they must deport that middle-aged woman who seems to be their paymaster, or is it paymistress?

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